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By Dorothy Salisbury Davis

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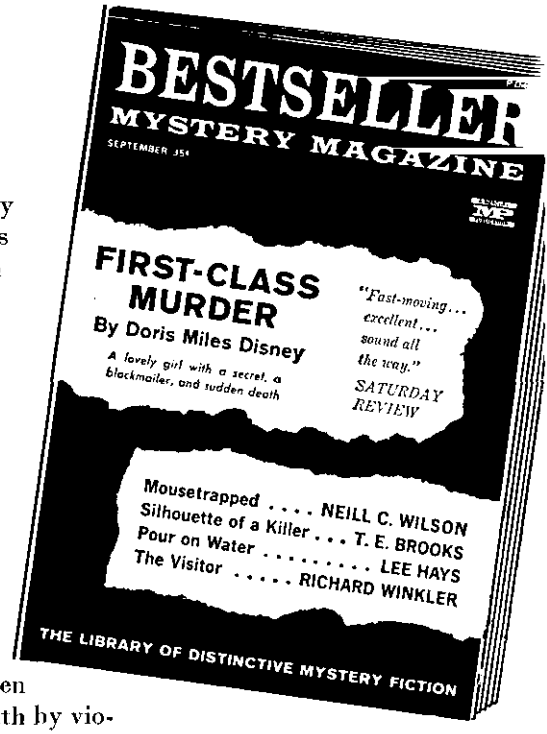
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The Library of Distinctive Mystery Fiction

BESTSELLER MYSTERY MAGAZINE

March 1960 *Including* MERCURY MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DEATH OF AN OLD SINNER *Dorothy Salisbury Davis* 5

When Jimmie Jarvis, aspiring to be governor, finds himself embroiled by the machinations of a political campaign and two beautiful women, he has problems. Add a "problem father"—a gritty old retired general with an appetite for fast cars, liberal women, and a full wallet—and he's got something close to chaos. Especially when the General unwittingly infiltrates an underworld feud, and seems set on disproving the tradition that "old soldiers never die . . ."

Bagged *Steve April* 108

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Left Hand of Justice *Norman Daniels* 111

A savage contest of murder and revenge— with Ben Slade the unwilling referee . . .

How to Write a Detective Story *G. K. Chesterton* 125

A great writer's astute observations on detective-story craftsmanship . . .

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DEATH OF AN OLD SINNER *is a masterly blend of vigorous characterization and teasing suspense—a perfect illustration of why Dorothy Salisbury Davis is tops in the field of mystery fiction. Retired General Ransom Jarvis becomes involved in a precarious jumble of events including the forging of a diary and an underworld slaying. When the elusive General turns up in a Manhattan hotel room under rather strange circumstaces, Jasper Tully, investigator for the D. A., begins probing for answers. With Mrs. Norris, the General's housekeeper and Tully's self-appointed assistant, he begins a frantic search for a woman with a pet bird and a moon-faced chauffer . . .*

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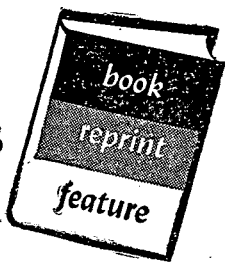
death of an old sinner

by DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS



CHAPTER ONE

ON GREY days General Jarvis was restless. He loathed the country, he loathed the house, a rambling, rattling affair in the wind which seemed now when he was approaching old age, to be making the same ghostly insinuations with which it had mocked him in his childhood. In those days it had boasted its Hudson River lore, a hideaway for river pirates, a refuge for runaway slaves, its acquaintance with men like Major André and Benedict Arnold, Rip Van Winkle, Ichabod Crane, the first Dutch burghers . . .

"Oh, do be quiet," he said, returning to his desk. That, too, was a nasty habit of age—old people forever talking to inanimate things: abusing a rocker, begging the fire not to go out on them. He looked at the title on the folder before him: *"The Memoirs of Major General Ransom*

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Jarvis, U.S. Army, Retired."

Start it off with a few boyhood reminiscenses, he had been advised. Well, he could remember fox hunting in Rockland County, and ice-boat racing on the Hudson above Hook Mountain. He remembered the coaches that met trains at the Piermont terminal a few miles south. He had held the horses while they loaded. And your ancestors, something about them. There was a president in the family, wasn't there? Not much of a president, the General thought now, looking up at the portrait of a face with an expression quite as sour as his own mood. And your military career, of course. Five continents, three wars. The General puffed his cheeks and exploded a blast of air that would have shivered Ulysses. Some men at seventy-two might be content with their memoirs, their sherry, their dogs. His bored him to despair. The only things worth telling raised the question of libel, violation of other peoples' privacy, or some such nonsense, and might also vicariously injure the career of his promising son. Don't you mean the promising career of your son, General? he asked himself on behalf of some editorial inquisitor.

"No, by God! I mean my promising son. The things that lad has promised me . . ." The General rooted in the top drawer for his bank book, knowing exactly how little was tallied there and how long it needed to last him. He had already spent the advance payment on his memoirs, and thus far had made no more than a few skirmishes into its writing, neat little phrases in an elegant, old-fashioned law clerk's hand.

He heard a door bang downstairs, and presently from the courtyard the off-key voice of Mrs. Norris as she raised it as high as the wind. She had been keeping the Nyack house for him since Jimmie was an infant and himself a widower, and she couldn't carry a better tune now than she could . . . how long? . . . oh my God, over forty years ago. It was unworthy of him, the General knew, but he could not avoid the thought of how her bank book must compare with his.

He decided to shave before going to her.

Mrs. Norris could have predicted, almost to the hour, the General's descent from his study. It was a great waste on the part of the United States Army to retire a man like him so early, but that, if there was any one thing she had learned of America in her forty-two years of residence, was typical of the whole country.

She had come over from Scotland at twenty, Mrs. Norris had, already a childless widow, and the truth was that over the years, adding a bit now and then to her husband's stature from what she took off that of other men, she prob-

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ably loved him better now than ever she did in their brief marriage. He had been off to his last sailing within a week of their wedding. And she, having come out soon thereafter to her sister in Brooklyn, had almost as soon been eager for her independence. Starting as nurse for General Jarvis' son James, she had approved the house from the moment she put her foot inside the door, although to this day she did not altogether approve of the General.

The General was holding the door open for her when Mrs. Norris came in from the clothesline with the last of the sheets. Her nose was as red as pimento.

"Couldn't we strike a match, Mrs. Norris?" he said, with a nod at the open hearth, and a wink at his double meaning.

So, she thought, that's the mood he's in. He'll want to go into New York now, and she calculated the day of the month, and by it, the state of his finances. "Not for me," she said, "but if you're staying in my kitchen, light it."

This was the day he was not going to get round her flank, the General realized, so he might as well make a direct assault. "You wouldn't have a few dollars about the house you could spare till the first, would you?"

"I would not. Mr. James said I could not give you any money while he was gone, sir."

The General clattered his heels on the brick floor. "I would remind you, Mrs. Norris, that Mr. James wasn't as big as a wink when you were hired."

"Yes, sir."

She was humble enough, he thought, when she had her money well buried. "Mr. James is now trying to hasten me into my dotage."

"If you hadn't put a lien on your pension, sir . . ."

"I should not have had an automobile! Or do you agree with Mr. James about that also, Mrs. Norris, that at my age I don't need an automobile?"

"I don't think you need a Jaguar, sir, if you want the truth."

"I don't want the truth!" the General roared. "What's so damned necessary about the truth all the time?"

Mrs. Norris drew her dumpy shape to its best height. "Oh, I'll say again what I've said many's the time in this house, if it wasn't for little Master Jamie, I'd give my notice."

"And many's the time if it wasn't for little Master Jamie, I'd have taken it. Little Master Jamie is forty-two years old!"

The General marched out of the kitchen and clacked his heels on the polished floor all the way back to his study. It was a terrible thing for a man to escape the discipline of military life into the tyranny of his family. Old generals, by God, should not be left to fade away.

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Like horses, they should be shot on becoming obsolete.

He shoveled the papers strewing his desk into the folder and gazed up at the portrait of his ancestor, the family's man of distinction—more or less. He had been a one term president of the United states. Unmarried, he had founded neither line nor fortune, unless, as Mrs. Norris would have said, it was done without his ken.

An unlikely situation that, by the looks of him. But bloody unfair it was to hang on the best wall in the house for a hundred or so years, and to have made no more contribution to the family than a clutter of papers in the attic and the reputation for having been one of the best forgotten presidents of your country.

The General rested his backside on his desk and sucked on the empty pipe, gazing still at the portrait. "Not a memoir, not a biography," he said aloud. "Look at you—sitting there like a hand-painted burp, an apt subject for neither gossip nor historian, your back to the wall, not a decade between you and oblivion. You know, Mr. President, you would have done much better by us to have kicked up your heels a bit, and I dare say, by yourself as well. A bit of scandal has saved many a nincompoop.

"Tell me, Mr. President, was there nothing in your life that could, shall we say, prosper us now? I have an open mind and an empty purse. Tell me the truth, is it worth my while to go up to the attic? To sort out that trunkful of papers? Eh, Mr. President?"

CHAPTER TWO

THE sky was grey over Albany also at that hour, more snow starting to fall, great flakes of it clinging to the dirty hotel windows for an instant, slithering down then, down, down, down into vanishing rivulets. Jimmie Jarvis watched them, listening the while to the unending objections and justifications of himself in the blunt terms of political caucus.

Suddenly the men circling the table leaned back. Some lighted fresh cigars, some relighted stale ones. One of the two women present offered the other a king-sized cigaret. They all looked at Jimmie then, and their faces, friends' as well as foes', wore that slightly cynical expression which said in effect: all right, you're it. Why? Why you and not me?.

Jimmie Jarvis—James Ransom Jarvis—rose, and fastened the middle button of his coat. That was a mistake, buttoning his coat. He could feel his heartbeat outside as well as within him. But he was not in the habit of correcting his mistakes in public. He put his hands in his trouser pockets and rocked back on his heels.

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"My friends—and if you are not completely friendly, I direct myself even more to you—I am aware of the responsibility you will be offering me as well as the honor and the privilege—if you sustain until convention day the sentiment just expressed . . ."

Jimmie smiled then, seeing one after another of the delegates relax. He had put in enough "ifs" to assure them of his humility. He was forty-two, a bachelor, and seemed boyishly earnest in everything he did, and he had done many things in an already long public career. Ironically, his potential enemies here opposed him for the same reason his friends proposed him: he had once been New York District Attorney. There were men present who felt that a prosecutor was a dangerous man in any office, especially that of governor to which Jimmie now aspired. He looked from face to face of the men whose consent was still grudging. "You must remember, gentlemen, that as well as my hitch in the office of district attorney, I have also served in the United States House of Representatives. That I submit, would take the spurs off any cock."

This brought a crack in the great stone faces. At the moment there was no laughter in them.

"I have no speech to make, my friends, but I will answer frankly all questions."

Al Rogers rolled the cigar from the center of his mouth to the side of it. "Jimmie, wasn't your great-grand-uncle ambassador to somewhere before he was president of the country?"

Al had the subtlety of a tabloid newspaper: he was calling attention to the fact that there had been a president in Jimmie's family.

Jimmie nodded. "To the Court of St. James, I believe."

"We'd better hold it in confidence then," said an old timer with a trace of a brogue. "Unless you don't need to carry New York City."

"It'll be distinction enough," said Al, "that he's the great-grand-nephew of a president."

Jimmie winced at the endless commercial.

"Great-grand-nephew," another delegate weighed the words ponderously. "Wouldn't it be all right at this distance to call him your great-grandfather?"

"It might be risky, sir," said Jimmie, "his having been a bachelor."

And no one found that amusing. Jimmie sighed. It was fortunate that the people had more wit than their delegates, and maybe more wisdom.

But the subject of bachelorhood had been turned up again, as though it had not already been well explored: he had been cautioned to marry a widow before summer; no, better a young girl of modest means and no renown;

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but the best advice was finally calculated to be that of the female delegates who were unanimous in their recommendation that he go before the people uncommitted in that regard; not a woman in the state then but would vote herself into the governor's mansion pulling the lever in his behalf.

With the bulldog air of having held onto one thought until he could spring it, Mike Zabriski waited till the lady's last remark and then said: "I don't suppose you've ever done anything in your life, young fella, that couldn't stand the scrutiny of the public eye?"

"I think, sir, the public eye would have long since found it," Jimmie said. "Look how it finds my father, every tumble he takes."

"An old man's tumbles, as you call them, are news—a young man's are maybe gossip. But in a man your age, they're dangerous."

In a man my age they are inevitable, Jimmie thought, but he put on a long face and said: "Yes, sir."

"Now answer my question," said Bulldog Mike.

Jimmie drew a deep breath. "I have been as honest as any man, Mike, and more discreet than most." To tell a lie as though it were the truth, he thought. But it was not a lie the way he had said it. Once only he had been less than cautious, and at a time in the world's history when caution was labeled the worth of fool's gold. And even in that instant, the cloak fate put about him and the lady resembled honor: she belonged to that noble race of people, who, if they were not proud of their sins, at least did not stoop to call them folly.

"That's good enough for me," said Mike, referring to Jimmie's avowal of honor and discretion.

With old Mike satisfied, no other delegate present dared complain. The meeting adjourned in good spirits. His enemies would not bare their fangs until he showed some weakness, and that was not to be at this, the king-making caucus. The Buffalo and New York timetables were already passing from hand to hand. Jimmie was bade by several gentlemen to give his father, the General, their warmest regards. He was asked if the old man would take to the stump on his behalf when the time came, and it was said that many an aging heart would flutter if the old boy strode out again.

Jimmie held Judge Turner's coat for him. He shrugged himself into it like a tired bear. The Judge, actually retired from the Appeals bench and a friend of his father's, would take upon himself more than ordinary arrangements in the forthcoming elections. He would try to arrange as well Jimmie's life for him. The Judge belonged to the Morals Squad of his party. He took Jimmie's arm. "It would be a fine thing to see your father in the

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reviewing stand for the St. Patrick's Day parade, a general in all his decorations."

"Better certainly than a mere major," said Jimmie, referring to his own rank in World War II.

"Is that as far as you got?" said the Judge as though a major were a very minor thing indeed.

Jimmie nodded.

"Didn't you go overseas?"

"Oh, yes. That I managed."

"Where?"

"I was stationed outside London," Jimmie said, wishing the Judge would get off the subject.

"Oh yes, yes. I remember. Well, just let your father stand in for you in matters military," he counseled. "I'll arrange it." Then as an afterthought: "How is he with the bottle these days?"

"Moderate," Jimmie said.

"And with the automobile?"

"More cautious than he used to be."

The Judge leaned closer to Jimmie after a glimpse around. One of the lady delegates stood nearby, her back to them. "And with the ladies?"

"More cautious than he used to be."

As soon as Judge Turner marched off, Madeline Barker swung around and laid her fingers on Jimmie's arm. She had been a woman of great beauty, Jimmie thought. Much of it was there still as she ran on for fifty, but it was shadowed with bitterness, and more deeply now for her smile.

"I was outside London, too, during the war, Mr. Jarvis. I wonder if we do not have some friends in common."

Jimmie could feel a prickle at the back of his neck: a legitimate danger signal or merely his own conscience? It was a difficult distinction. "No doubt we call all Englishmen our friends," he said smiling and taking her hand. "Who could fail to, having lived with them?"

"And English women?" said Miss Barker.

Surely she was not that gauche! "What they lack in beauty, they atone in fervor," he said, tacking into the weather to test it for storm.

"And what they lack in fervor they atone in discretion," she said.

"I admire that quality in all people," Jimmie said with all the considerable suavity he could muster. He pressed her fingers slightly before releasing them. "I expect I shall lean a great deal on your support, Madeline."

She gave his fingers a little squeeze in return. "I am but a fragile Barker on the sea of politics," she said.

There was something ludicrous in the bad pun as well as in the notion of her fragility. Miss Barker had run twice for Congress, unsuccessfully. She was all but resigned now to the making and breaking of other candidates, sit-

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ting on the State policy committee, and apparently she was not above a bit of intimidation after the candidate was made.

"Forgive me for running off," Jimmie said, "But I want very much to catch this train. Call me in New York? I promise an excellent lunch?" He put it all like a question which she must answer for him. If necessary, he could have caught a later train, but he felt it imperative to put Miss Barker congenially in her place. To stay and court her company, even to buy her a drink would, he thought, show alarm at her suggestion of intimacy with his affairs.

"Thank you, Mr. Jarvis."

"Jimmie?" he prompted.

"Jimmie," she repeated; "good luck!"

It was said with such conviction, he once more doubted everything save his conscience. As he got into his coat, he wondered if he was as much a hypocrite as he felt at that moment. The possibility depressed him.

CHAPTER THREE

It was three days before Jimmie got home to Nyack, what with several things in a personal and business way to be put in quick order before the rumor of his candidacy got too far ahead of him. He talked to Mrs. Norris on the telephone, however, and confided that he was bringing home some rather extraordinary news.

Consequently the house was aglow with lights when he turned into the driveway, and as soon as he put his foot on the step, he could see the housekeeper bounce across the living room like a robin, pushing her bosom ahead of her. If this was not what some men would call home, Jimmie mused, many a man would settle for it as a better than fair substitute.

"Was it a provident trip, Mr. James?" the housekeeper inquired, taking his coat.

"In a way you might say it was, Mrs. Norris. And in another way, you might say it was expensive. Where's the old fellow?"

She threw up her hands. "He's been flying round like a bat in the attic for days. One minute he's sour as a quince, and the next he's skipping with glee. I'm very glad you're home, sir."

"Call him down," said Jimmie, "and I'll tell you the news . . . but in the strictest of confidence."

"I'm not in the habit of spouting, Mr. James. I leave that to your father."

"And bring some ice when you come," said Jimmie.

Just how the General would take the news, Jimmie didn't know. There was no doubt about it, the old boy liked things happening, and while he liked fame in the family, he preferred it to be his own. Now that he was retired he

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was touchier than ever about Jimmie's success. And sure enough, after making a few congratulatory remarks, he said, "I suppose having me for your father was something of a handicap?"

"Judge Turner helped me overcome that," Jimmie said.

"I suppose the campaign will cost a great deal of money?" the General said.

But of course, Jimmie thought, that was burr now rubbing the old man. "I expect the party will make available enough money."

"Will it?" said the General, on the verge of sudden good humor.

"When the time comes I expect so. Are you broke, father?"

"Smashed."

"Well, that makes a pair of us. I've drawn all I can from the firm for the present." Jimmie turned to Mrs. Norris. "I suppose we'd better have dinner soon."

"Within the hour," she said, getting up. She gave Jimmie a great wink, always the mark of the "wee sup" in her. "And don't you worry about a thing, Mr. James."

The old man stomped out of the room ahead of her. "I'll be in my study when you're ready," he said.

"It's not as bad as I made it sound, Mrs. Norris," Jimmie confided when the General was gone. "But I can't have him making a touch this early in the month. What do you suppose he does with his money?"

"Fancy cars . . . and things," she said with Presbyterian ferocity.

The General was sure he smelt the reek of conspiracy as he left the room ahead of Mrs. Norris. Caution. Every move weighted with caution. There was no gamble in the younger generation—all of them huddled behind the inevitability of the atom. Nothing to be ventured, no frontiers, no enterprise. Only caution. No wonder the boy had still, by report, the bulk of his inheritance from his mother.

The General slammed the door of his study and looked up at his unsung relative. "Catch hold of a star, old boy! You and I are going for a spin."

He kicked up the fire; then, taking an ashtray and his pen knife, he scraped some carbon from a burnt log. This he diluted with a drop of water, added a drop of iodine and finally some black ink. It would not do for the finished product—if there was going to be a finished product—but for the first experiment, it might do very well.

He had brought from the attic a fine red leather notebook, a diary, the binding scarcely faded by time. Inside, the excellent paper was yellowed ever so slightly, and the the ink was fading through the years to a lighter brown. The diary he was by no means ready to

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touch—if ever he was going to touch it. He opened it to a half-empty page: the temptation was delicious. He put it by for the moment, locking the diary in the bottom drawer of his desk. He put the key beneath the frame of the President's picture.

He locked himself in his study then and took from a folder an old letter of his ancestor's; it had been written from England in his own hand, the subject a routine matter of diplomacy. The General, with military precision, took a nibbed pen in hand, dipped it into the concoction in the ashtray, exercised his arm on the desk, a circular motion, and added a postscript to the letter. "And Sylvia sends deep love," he wrote, adding a replica of the President's signature. He counted to five and blotted it, securing thereby a paleness to his taste. The ink, he thought, surveying the whole, was almost as good an imitation as his handwriting. Ah, but that was incomparable! Not for nought now, had he been stood long hours at the law clerk's desk as a boy, and made to imitate the briefs of the family firm, even as in his day, his father before him, and his grandfather, and likely, even Granduncle. That he had deserted the law for the military was directly attributable to the distaste his clerking days gave him for the law.

He washed out the ashtray in the sink and then dabbed his finger with a bit of iodine to account for the smell of it, although in truth the smell was much like that of the diary itself. Well, he must look up the formula for ink in those days . . . if he was to need the ink. He had but turned the key in his door and sat down again at his desk when Jimmie knocked.

"Come in, come in, lad," he said, as though the key were never turned against a soul.

Jimmie looked down at the folder of old papers. "Don't tell me somebody's interested in them?"

"Oh, I'm sure the Library of Congress would house them if they were offered."

"I suppose we should do that," Jimmie said. "After all, they are state papers."

"For the most part they're rubbish, like all state papers," the old man said. "But look at this." Without a tremble of his hand, though his heart gave a sudden pounce, he pointed to the line he had forged a few minutes before.

Jimmie read it and lifted his eyebrows. "Who was Sylvia?"

"My very question," the old man said. "I've been three days searching for her in that trunk up there. Read that again."

Jimmie read it aloud this time: "And Sylvia sends deep love." He picked up the letter then and read it through. He gave it back. "Think you'll find her, father?"

His son's absolute and doubtless

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assumption of the letter's having been written, postscript and all, a hundred years before, tickled the old man almost to ecstasy. He needed now to guard himself carefully. "If I find her, Jimmie, it might make a different man of our —forebear."

Jimmie grinned. "By the way, was Judge Turner in touch with you in the last day or so?" This was the question he had not dared ask downstairs.

"Uh-huh." The old man put away the folder. "Something about the Irish parade on St. Patrick's Day. I think he wanted me in the stands."

"Well?"

The old man snapped his fingers and then held out his hand, without turning round or rising from the desk. "I'll need some money to get my decorations."

"Where are they?"

"Eighth Avenue somewhere, I think. I have the ticket."

"Oh, my God," said Jimmie, "they're in hock!"

The General swung around. "You would be surprised, my boy, at what good company that puts me in."

The next day, it being her afternoon off, Mrs. Norris rode into New York with the General. For all her deprecations of the Jaguar, she was quick enough to leap into it, he thought. She swathed her head—hat and all—in a scarf, locked her hands like a safety belt across her stomach, and gave a nod of her head for him to drive on.

"I suppose you're on your way to Brooklyn?" he said.

"I am, to my sister's," Mrs. Norris said. "You can drop me at the subway."

The General nodded. "How are the Robinsons?"

"Well enough for getting on. They always ask after you, sir."

"Do they?" said the General, and he wondered just what Mrs. Norris would say if she knew that he too would be seeing at least one of the Robinsons later in the day. Little she knew what a friendship had started on her introduction of Robbie and him the summer before. Robbie was an expert on horses, and therefore had a fair acquaintance with where and when the best of them were running. And that was but one of the Scotsman's useful hobbies, although it was the only one to date of which the General had taken advantage. "He's a printer, is he not?" the old man said for the sheer pleasure of deceiving her.

"Aye, and with his own shop and journeymen under him. Prospered he has with hard work. He came over an immigrant, too."

The General gave the car a kick into high gear to be the quicker shed of her, and not another word was said between them.

Mrs. Norris took the BMT, and the moment she descended the

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subway steps she felt her mood improve.

Her brother-in-law, whom she always called Mr. Robinson, was, to her surprise, home when she arrived. And it was much to her pleasure. He was ever a cheerful man, where her sister Mag seemed given more every year to complaining.

Mr. Robinsin took her coat and said into her ear: "You've roses still in your cheeks, Annie, never mind the frosty pow."

"The frosty pow," she repeated, running her hand over the white strands of her hair. "You're handsome as ever yourself, Mr. Robinson. It's the ride in the car—in the Jaguar if you please—that flushed my cheeks."

"Is it paid for yet?" said Mag.

And somehow Mrs. Norris resented the question although she was herself responsible for the information. "We're doing very nicely in the family, Mag. And there are certain omens in the wind that we may soon be doing better."

"Oh-ho?" said Mr. Robinson, pulling his chair closer to Mrs. Norris. "Would it be the young one or the old bird that's bringing that to the nest?" There was something in his question and his way of asking it too direct for Mrs. Norris' tastes, and her brother-in-law saw it immediately himself. "Aren't you going to give your sister a cup of tea to warm her?" he cried to his wife.

"You're home at a queer hour, Mr. Robinson," Mrs. Norris said.

"How else would I get to see you?" he said with a wink. Was it, Mrs. Norris wondered, that she was getting old and skeptical? That wink seemed to have been a strain on Mr. Robinson. For the first time in all the years of their acquaintance she doubted the sincerity of his cheerful banter. And look at Mag: she was wrinkled as a bag of cheese while he was blooming. But after a while, Mr. Robinson bringing out a bottle of what he called "Boggy Dew," Mrs. Norris thought it was all in her imagination.

"I remember," said Mr. Robinson when the drink was down, "your old gentleman was talking of writing his memoirs. Lively enough wouldn't you say they might be?"

"Lively enough to shame us all," said Mrs. Norris.

"You don't tell," said Mag, with her first pep of the day.

"He's been reading them to her," said Mr. Robinson with a wink.

"He's neither reading nor writing them, thank God for our respectability."

"Sometimes," said Mag, wrinkling her nose with disappointment, "I wonder if your respectability hasn't got in the way of your chances."

Mrs. Norris squared her shoulders. "My chances for what, pray?"

"Oh, for the love of heaven, don't be starting to snipe at each

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other. Wouldn't the two of you like to go to a motion picture?" Mr. Robinson put his hand in his pocket.

"It might improve our dispositions," Mag said forlornly.

"Aw . . ." said Robbie, the twenty dollar bill already in his wife's hand, "I'm like all the victims of the con men. Get me once and you got me forever. You do this to me every time, the two of you. I must be off now."

CHAPTER FOUR

THIS was to be the General's first visit to Mr. Robinson's place of business although he had had a standing invitation for some months. His interest in the dapper little man had been first provoked by Robbie's knowledge of foreign cars which ran to such refinements as special models and the people who owned them, and then of course, there was the matter of horses, on which he was also an expert. Beyond these interests, Robbie had yet another, and that one the General had never expected to find useful to himself, English Royalty. But when he picked the printer up at the appointed hour, he came around to the subject as soon as possible.

"Do you remember telling me about your collection of royal crests and coats of arms and whatnot?

"I remember," Robbie said.

"And charting a course to them for some obscure American descendants?"

"Was that how I put it?" said Robbie. "Oh yes, I remember. But there wasn't enough profit in printing the blasted things. And there were other complications. Ah, but I loved the research. D'you know, General, there's times I'd sooner be parted with Mag than with my books?"

"You still have the books then?"

"An office full of them."

The General grunted his satisfaction. "Robbie, how would you like to help me set up a little detour in the course of history?"

"I suppose," he said, after considerable thought, "it would depend on the amount of traffic, if you know what I mean."

A few minutes later they parked in the lot at the rear of Mr. Robinson's plant, and Robbie getting out from the Jaguar, took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from his hands. Despite the weather, they were almost running with his nerves. He resolved to ride no more with General Jarvis in the city. He even wiped the handle of the car door where it, too, was moist from his clutching it.

Two men, watching from the doorway of the restaurant across the street, exchanged looks and ambled across the street with deliberate ease. Robbie noticed them,

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wondered where he had seen them before, speculated idly on whether their tans came from a gymnasium sun lamp or the Florida sun and then forgot about them.

The General's first impression of the shop was that no great amount of printing was done in it, not enough certainly to occupy the platoon of men lolling about, not one of whom seemed any more inclined to set to work on Robbie's arrival than he had been in his absence.

"What do they do?" he asked out.

"They're ru . . . markable men, all of them," Robbie said, steadying himself after a quick change of course. If the General didn't understand what he saw, there was no need to start his education at this age. "They're messengers."

"Are they," the old man murmured.

"And this is a linotype machine," said Robbie, steering him past the one piece of equipment and into a hallway.

It needed dusting, the General thought of the machine, but he said nothing.

"Most of our work is done out," Robbie further explained, opening the door and turning the light switch in his private office. "I keep a few lads on the phone to take orders, and I have a good man on my books."

"An accountant," said the General, following his host's example and hanging his overcoat on the hall tree inside the door. Robbie looked at him sharply: the question often came up between them —who was pulling whose leg? "The most important man in our generation, Robbie, but it's not your accountant I'm interested in. I want to inquire into a certain English family of a hundred or so years ago—that of a Lady Sylvia Mucklethrop. She may have been the last of the line. I expect they're extinct by now."

"Oh, no," said Robbie. "They're very much alive."

"Are they," the General growled. "I'd never have expected it by her taste in gentlemen." He thought about the implications of a thriving, respectable clan of Mucklethrops to his scheme. But, of course! That was better still! More's the interest.

"You'll want to look them up," said Robbie. And with that he motioned the General into a leather-upholstered chair, while he pushed a couple of buttons, one of which threw more light on what had seemed a very dismal office indeed, and the other of which turned panels as dark likely as the inside of a coffin round to shelf upon shelf of books. Robbie, with a flourish of his hand, unrolled a map and then a chart which by cross reference, he explained, would give the key to the lands and kins of many a noble family, in-

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cluding the Mucklethrops. Still another chart indicated the make and model of automobiles in the family. To complete the General's bewildered admiration, he opened what looked like a wall safe and brought from it a bottle of eighteen year old Scotch whiskey. He set it up with glasses.

"I have to leave you for a while now, sir. I'll be back after post time . . ."

"When?" said the General.

"After the postman goes. I have a ton of orders to get into the afternoon mail."

"Carry on," said the General, already under the British influence.

Alone in the room, or thinking himself alone, he was suddenly elated at the discovery of the name Mucklethrop. It so absorbed him that he was scarcely aware of a great lump of a fellow sweeping the office until the man swept off the tops of the General's shoes. The General bent down to look; so did the sweeper, and straightened up with him also, like a burlesque comic. The old man looked about for something to throw at him, but the fellow was gone before he found it, and all the General remembered of his looks really was that his face was the color of stage makeup.

And what a turn that gave the General, thinking of stage makeup!

Flora: it was as though his Flora had come into the room and gone from it, just while his back was turned, and not Flora as he knew her now, but as she was when he first met her. He was tempted then to pick up Robbie's phone and call her. He lifted the receiver. It was an extension phone, the line in use. He had not thought of Flora like that, in connection with the stage—for how long? Not at least since she herself had forsaken show business, and had become content in the small apartment he provided for her. He decided to let the call go since he would be seeing her that night. But he must remember to tell her. What an extraordinary experience! Like peeling twenty years from his life.

He forced himself back to his researches. "Suppose you were a Mucklethrop, Robbie," he said when the printer returned, "would it distress you to discover that your great-grandmother carried on a bit with a gentleman who was subsequently President of the United States?"

"If it was true, I'd probably find it amusing. And if it was false, General, I'd sue to the depth of American prosperity."

"Oh, so would I, so would I," said the General.

"Is it the old gentleman whose picture is in your study?"

"The very same. He's been confiding to me about the Mucklethrops, Robbie," said the General slyly.

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"Why, the old bastard."

The General grinned. He gave Robbie a gentle poke. "And something he's taught me: how to sign his name. Look." The General took his pen from his pocket and looped the signature, complete with its nineteenth century flourishes.

"Oh, the villain!" Robbie cried and took his handkerchief to the palms of his hands again.

"Do I dismay you?" the General asked, destroying the paper in the ashtray.

"Dismay is too mild a word. You shock hell out of me, sir."

The General gave a grunt of approval. "Before he was president, he served at the Court of St. James —this philandering ancestor of mine. He kept a diary that would put you to sleep even if you had a toothache . . . But, Robbie, he left a great blank at the end of each day's trivia as though he some day meant to enter the truth. That's what you and I are about to compose, to give to the world, and demand that history take another look at him! Is that not an honorable intent?"

"The very soul of it," said Robbie, with a bright sort of despair.

"I shall have to use a nibbed pen, of course," the General said. "Oh, there's something else I'll need. I have a formula here for ink. Do you know a chemist?"

"Kind of a chemist."

"Ring him up and engage him," the General said, and rubbed his hands together.

Robbie looked at him with admiration. "You mentioned the honorable intent of this . . . this . . ."

"Historical supplement," the General promoted. "And you would like to know the dubious intent?"

"Aye," said Robbie, "since my share likely comes out of that."

"Quite. I'm doing it for money. I expect to publish these memoirs which I, in family pride, have rescued from the dust, and to accept as my inheritance the royalties therefrom."

"'Tis only fair," said Robbie, "but just as a matter of information, General—in case, mind only in case something gangs awry—would you still be able to draw your pension in the pokey?"

"Damn it, sir, I might as well be in the pokey now for all I see of it!"

Robbie laughed then and the two men bent with a will to the task at hand.

CHAPTER FIVE

SINCE his return from Albany with the promise of the gubernatorial nomination, Jimmie had spent most of his time at the office, and he made sure that the senior partners knew it. He would have liked very much to defend in

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a good jury trial before summer, even if it meant a curtailment of his campaigning. Or perhaps especially if it meant such curtailment. And he belonged to a firm who still believed in going to court now and then. He was still a junior partner, however, and although it had never been so specified, he was not likely to become a senior until his father died. The old gentleman had in his youth, by leaving the firm for the military, reduced almost to permanent clerkship the Jarvis position. If there had been a younger Jarvis now in Harvard Law School, Jimmie thought . . . But there was not. In fact there was not even one in the cradle.

Still, Jimmie was only a little discontented in politics, and he wore the aura of his law firm—of all the things he thought it meant and wished it meant to him—into the political forum. That was part of his charm: his fairly modern ideas in the comfortable old shell of Victorian conservatism. Also, Jimmie thought, taking his own measure that afternoon, he had been given his childhood training by Mrs. Norris, and when in his youth it had come time for him to rebel from something, it had been from Mrs. Norris. For all he knew, that was why he had gone home to her from every woman he had known since.

Several times during the day he had thought of another woman he should call, indeed must call, to confirm their weekly date of that evening. Then the phone rang, he heard her voice and knew why he had not made the call. Helene Joyce would not suit the tastes of the party executives. But what he was going to do about it, he didn't know.

"Hello, darling," he said, "I was about to call you."

"Don't ever say that, Jimmie, even when it's the truth."

The words hit him like a blow. "Right you are, my dear."

"I don't want to be right, Jimmie. You know what I want."

And those words struck more deeply, twisting inside him the roots of longing to be with her. "Where shall we have dinner, Helene?"

She laughed softly. "I do embarrass you, don't I? I should like to go to the Ponder Inn tonight, since you've asked me."

He would have preferred dinner at her apartment, the old enchantment once again upon him. "Why there?" he said.

"Jimmie, you make the arrangements."

"Of course not, Helene. I was merely curious. I'll call for you at seven."

"Let's meet there then," she said. "I know you are to be congratulated, and I'm sure you must be very busy. Seven-thirty at the Ponder Inn?"

"Right," he said, and looked at

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the phone a moment in his hand when she had hung up. How, he wondered, had she come by the knowledge of his prospective candidacy. She was not that intuitive—though damned intuitive she was.

He had met Helene ten years before—attending an exhibit of her sculpture with a friend. She had been a model in her youth, an artist's model known the breadth of Greenwich Village. Now her fame was considerably wider, international in scope. But, Jimmie thought, grimly, it would be the Greenwich Village phase of her renown which would interest the Party.

Jimmie dressed at his club and at seven-twenty-five was standing outside the Ponder Inn on East Fifty-second Street watching for Helene's cab. She was not yet late, but at the moment she should have arrived, another cab drew up. The doorman opened it and Jimmie peered in. He recognized and was recognized by Judge Turner.

The Judge emerged murmuring something like "Ah, my boy, how are you?" and Jimmie gave his hand into the cab to assist Mrs. Turner from it. It was a frail hand took his, but the old lady smiled into his face.

"How like your father, Jimmie!" she said, leaning an instant on him to gain her balance. "But so much steadier." She squeezed his hand before releasing it.

"I don't suppose you're dining alone," the Judge said.

"No, sir," Jimmie said, but at that moment Helene arrived and he needed to introduce her. Beautiful she was, but with a lean, almost lupine sort of beauty—sensuous without being smackingly feminine. Jimmie sensed the reserve gathering in the Judge's wife.

"Mrs. Joyce," the judge repeated, not quite acknowledging or rejecting the introduction.

Jimmie's spirits sank to their lowest.

They parted, the two couples, to their separate reservations within the Ponder. For a long moment, Helene sat and looked at him, into him. Jimmie lifted his chin a little, but said nothing. When their drinks were served, Helene held up her martini and touched her glass to his. "Good-bye, Jimmie," she said and drank a deeper draft than should be taken of a martini.

"You do take giant steps, don't you?" Jimmie said.

"I can even run when I have to," she said.

"Would you mind running into my arms before running out of them?" he said, and then rather savagely, because he was being weak in saying that: "Who the devil has been talking to you?"

Helene smiled. "Among others, the Judge's wife just now although she said not a word."

"She's an old hypocrite."

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"Whatever she is, she's not that, Jimmie. And you know it as well as I do. I read in Lem Python's column—you're lunching with Madeline Barker these days."

Jimmie bristled. "She anticipates," he said.

Helene laughed. "But of course she does—that you'll be governor. I must tell you of an old association some day. Neither the best nor the worst of my youth." She was thoughtful for a moment. "If ever Madeline Barker should try to blackmail you, Jimmie . . ."

"What?" He started violently.

"I do have a dirty mind. Am I right that it's to be governor?"

He nodded.

Helene studied her glass turning it slowly round with a strong, veined hand. She looked up at him. "Do you think you might be president some day?"

"I am not that ambitious."

Jimmie was saved from needing to answer another of her painful questions by the arrival at their table of the head waiter. With the menu he gave Jimmie a note, written on the back of Judge Turners card. It reads: "I will phone you at Nyack at 11 o'clock tonight."

Jimmie swore softly under his breath. On Helene's quizzical look, he gave her the card.

"I suppose," she said, "there's no question of your not being there?"

"He is, in effect, ordering me home to bed," said Jimmie.

"Alone," Helene said bluntly. She gave a great sigh. "I suppose I must tell you the story of my youth one of these days. New York is like the palm of your hand, Jimmie, millions of lines you scarcely see, but crossing and recrossing." She shrugged. "Palmistry is for the young."

Jimmie took his pen and a card from his pocket and wrote: "I'm sorry, sir. But I will not be there." He gave it to Helene to read.

She smiled and tore it up. "Shall we order dinner, Jimmie? In a way I'm grateful. My work has been suffering. You are a dreadful distraction."

A few minutes later, and when they had finally managed a conversation without strain, they were again interrupted by the head waiter. This time Jimmie was wanted on the telephone. Since the only person who knew where he was—aside from Judge Turner—was the valet at his club, someone had been at considerable pains to find him. He excused himself and took the call in the manager's office.

Mike Zabriski was on the phone. There had been a leak all right on what had gone on at Albany, and furthermore to where it could hurt most, according to Mike: the opposition was going into Jimmie's record as District Attorney.

"Let them," Jimmie said irritably. "It's clean."

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"You're talking to old Mike, young fella, nobody's record is that clean."

"Yes, sir," Jimmie said.

"The way I heard it just now, for example, you made a great hoopdedoo in the papers back in the 'forties, and all the time was pushing a deal so that Johnny Rocco would just move out of your yard into Brooklyn."

"That is fantastic," Jimmie said.

"To tell the truth, son. I don't remember you prosecuting The Rock, and I don't think you needed extradition papers for Brooklyn."

"I needed cooperation, that's what I needed . . . sir."

"All right, young fella, but if I was you I'd think up the names of the people who were supposed to cooperate with you and didn't. We may need 'em. Seems like the present regime is doggone cooperative. They're out in Brooklyn now trying to pick up The Rock for questioning."

"I hope they find him," Jimmie said.

Mike's sigh into the phone came like the sound of the sea in a conch. "The Rock's an old man. He ought to have enough by now to retire to Florida, and you know, Jimmie—I wish he would. Goodnight, son."

What the Party needed, Jimmie thought, was to retire its old time hacks like Mike Zabriski. He looked at his watch. Almost nine already. Within the hour he would have to start for home. As far as he was concerned at the moment, the Judge, too, was past retirement age.

When he got back to the table, Helene was gone. The head waiter held his chair. "Madame did not wait for dessert. She said you would understand."

CHAPTER SIX

THE GENERAL and Robbie had long since arrived at the authentic family affiliations of all whom the "diarist" proposed to make famous. And now, awaiting the return of Robbie's chemist, they were turning the spirited events of their creation into rather dull affairs by converting them into the President's style. It would be a fine irony, the General thought, if the old bore managed even at this distance to blunt the prickle of scandal. Remarkable, he complained to Robbie, what a bad cook could do to good meat.

This brought their consideration to the dinner hour, and Robbie thought it best to bring in sandwiches since there was no telling when his chemist friend would return. The General grumbled about his digestion, the simplicity of the ink formula, and his need of another drink. The drink Robbie provided, and himself got into his overcoat to go for the sandwiches. He stuck his hand in his pocket,

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and along with his gloves pulled out a wallet. He was a minute looking at it, taken by surprise, and then opened it to the identification.

"You're getting careless with your fortune, man," he said, and tossed the wallet on the desk to the General. "You must have put it in my pocket instead of your own."

The General instinctively put his hand to the pants' pocket in which he normally kept his wallet. It was empty except for a piece of notepaper.

"I'm off," said Robbie. "I'll not be long."

The General merely nodded. He unfolded the paper and took a three-line typewritten note to the light. He read:

> I want a piece of your little plum. Make arrangements while you are there tonight or I will make them for you. You are an old man. There is enough for both of us.
>
> Nick Casey

The name also was typed. The General sat down heavily. He might have taken his wallet from his pocket during the afternoon, but as sure as he spent the day in consciousness, he had not taken off his clothes to give anyone the opportunity of putting the note in his pocket. Nor did he put the wallet in Robbie's pocket. And at first the message made no sense to him at all. Except that the name Nick Casey was vaguely familiar.

"I want a piece of your little plum . . . tonight . . ." Flora? Did it mean Flora? But of course it meant Flora! Memory and comprehension smote him. He sat very still, commanding himself to beware of anger. At his age it could be his greatest enemy.

How well he remembered Nick Casey now! A few years ago when he returned from Europe and was spending his first evening with Flora—during the Kefauver crime hearings it was—she had gone down to the delicatessen and and brought up along with the groceries a tabloid newspaper. And there was Casey's picture. "Just look at him," said Flora, and not without admiration. "Imagine, I went to public school with him. He gave me my first job. In Coney Island it was and now he owns all kinds of places in Jersey."

And of course! The oaf pushing the broom over his shoes, a nimble-fingers, a pickpocket in Casey's employ! Likely he just walked in. How would Robbie know one man from another with the motley assortment he had in the place?

"Enough for both of us!" the General cried aloud in agony, quoting the note. The vulgar, uncouth, arrogant villain!

The General had got some hold on himself by the time Robbie returned. And Robbie was now given also to thoughtfulness; had the General been less absorbed in his own problem, he might have seen

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it. He would have mentioned the whole matter to his friend, but what gentleman could make such a distasteful disclosure, and of so personal an affair? He and Robbie ate their sandwiches in respect for each other's silences. Finally, the chemist, a Mr. Chipsey, arrived.

He was, and even the General noticed it, a very nervous man. The General gathered his papers into his dispatch case, and put on his coat, feeling the alarm in the air.

"You know the place is bein' cased, Robbie," Mr. Chipsey said.

"Is that what those men are doing?" said Robbie, in so pious a tone even the General looked round at him.

"And you know whose boys they are, don't you?"

"No."

"Nick Casey's. Imported from Florida, so something's up."

"Nick Casey's," Robbie repeated. "I've been told they can get very nasty."

"It wasn't square of you, Robbie, to've pulled me in here, I can't afford any trouble," the "chemist" whined.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," the General said, putting on his hat with great dignity. "I do believe Mr. Casey's interest is in myself only . . ."

"What?" Robbie shouted. "You're mixed up with Nick Casey, and come here to me like a bloody germ carrier!"

The General was always at his calmest just before zero. He turned to the other man, "Did you bring the ink, Mr. Chipsey?"

Chipsey took the bottle from his pocket. "You meant ink—when you said ink," he asked very deliberately, "didn't you?"

"Of course he did," Robbie shouted.

"You can have it free gratis," Chipsey said, and gave him the bottle.

The General decided it was no time to quibble. "Goodbye, Robbie. Wish me luck."

Robbie took his hand. "I'm sorry I spoke like I did to you, sir. You're a gentleman and a scholar."

The General moved into the hall and out the back door as against a wind. No sooner did Robbie turn the key than he switched out every light in the building. In the near darkness the General measured the distance between him and the Jaguar and just at that instant two men moved in, one on either side of him.

"Well, old man," one of them said, "what do we tell the boss?"

"Tell him it's up to Miss Tims herself," the General said.

"Huh?"

The General went on, doing a bit of a dance as though their touch were loathsome to him: "If he expects to move in tonight, I shall be there, waiting for him." With that he executed a quick move whereby one thug threw the

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block intended for him on the other, while the General broke into the open, the Jaguar's key in his hand. He primed her with his foot and she rose as though it were a spur. In the last moment before her motor roared, the General heard men shouting; distinctly he heard: "Turn 'em loose on him, the bulls! Turn 'em loose!" The Jaguar bolted into the street. And sure enough, just before he opened the car up on the parkway, he heard the screaming of sirens. He turned east and circled west later, and was never overtaken.

The General did what might be called knee-dips, waiting the elevator in the hallway of Flora's building. Whatever it was he had come out of—what was he entering into? The usual welcome of Flora's parakeet to his rap on the door did not raise his spirits. "Ransom, Ransom, Ransom," it croaked.

"I almost fell asleep, Ransom, honey. You're so late." Flora all but yawned in his face.

Greeting him thus she could scarcely have entertained Nick Casey while waiting for him, the General thought. "A bit of trouble, my dear, a bit of trouble," the General said, and kissed her cheek. "You smell delicious. Do I know it—your essence?" He gave his finger to the bird to peck at a couple of times. After that it quieted for the evening.

"Essence," Flora chided in her languid way, "they don't call it that anymore, Ransom. That's an old fashioned word, essence."

"We're fairly old fashioned people, you and I, Flora." He looked at her critically. "You aren't dieting again, are you?"

Flora sat on the back of a chair. "I never knew a more observant man in my life. I just haven't been feelin' very well, Ransom." The drawl crept into her voice.

She had not in all these years of his telling her that he loathed the false accent she put on, realized that he really meant it, that whatever she hoped to wheedle from him thereby would be harder to get for it, not easier. Still, maybe she was right. She got what he could give her, one way or the other, and the drawl was her notion of charm, skill, witchery. It was something she could tote up in a personal assessment.

"Come tell me about it, Flora," he said, and held his hand out.

She sat on the arm of his chair and stroked his hand. Then she gave a great sigh. "I suppose I got to expect it, Ransom, but I get so blue and lonesome."

"Lonesome," he mimicked her pronunciation. "I received a communication today from an old flame of yours—one, I hope, my dear, you'll put out promptly."

"Tell me about it," Flora said languidly.

"I suppose you've given him no encouragement?"

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"I don't know if I have or not, Ransom," she said in a schoolgirl fashion that touched his anger, "since I don't know who you're talkin' about."

"I'm talking about Nick Casey, Flora."

Her whole face blossomed into the smile. "Was Nick enquirin' after me, Ransom?"

"That is a quaint way of putting it, to say the least."

"Nick Casey," she mooned. "What does he look like now? Is he handsome still? When we were in public school, Ransom . . ."

"I know," he cut her off rudely. "It's a charming story." He took his hand from hers and caught her chin between his thumb and forefinger. "When did you see him last?"

"In person?" Flora queried.

"He's a gangster, woman, not a movie star! Yes, in person."

Flora sighed and her eyes were wistful. "It was so long ago, my hair was natural. But he gave me a job in one of his clubs."

There was something very wrong, the General thought. He wanted to read the note again now, but not in front of her. So he suggested that they have a drink and Flora went to the kitchenette for ice. He re-read Casey's note and was no wiser. "I want a piece of your little plum." The President's diary? It could not be. The scheme was no further along than the vision in his mind. Unless Casey had been listening when he sketched the plan to Robbie. Impossible. No more than a half-hour intervened between Robbie's departure from his private office and the oaf's appearance. No, no, no. The diary was too subtle a business for Casey. "Face it—you are old man . . ." Damn his insolence.

The General went to the phone then, taking his address book from his pocket. He dialed a number, and waiting an answer, blew a kiss to Flora. With her ruddy cheeks, she belonged in a French salon, by God, he thought, with her shoulders bare, her bosom . . ."Hello, Fowler? Ransom Jarvis speaking. How are you?"

The man at the other end asked if he could call the General back in a few minutes. The General gave him the number, hung up the receiver but held the phone in his hand while he waited. "You know, Flora, how some people cannot look you in the eye while talking to you?" She nodded, "Here's a fellow that way on the telephone, believe it or not. No matter what hour you call him, at home or at the office, he must call you back. He needs to pretend that he's that busy. Sometimes I wonder if he pretends it to himself as well."

"It takes all kinds," Flora said. She came behind the General and brushed beneath his jaw with her cool fingers. "Who is he, Ransom?"

"An agent, a literary agent." As

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the General had expected, the phone rang within a minute. "Look, Fowler," he said, "I have a literary property I think you might like to place—what? . . . No, not my memoirs. I'll be at them soon. This is something interesting . . ."

They made a date for ten the next morning. The General hung up the phone and looked at his watch. It was a few minutes past ten. He was suddenly very tired. Despite the note in his pocket, he was beginning to doubt the seriousness of Nick Casey's threat.

"Ransom, when you write your memoirs, am I goin' to be in them?"

He pulled her down on his lap. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to keep you hidden away in my heart forever," he said.

She was slow in speaking and her eyes came round to his slowly, as she pushed away from him. "I don't really mean much to you, do I, Ransom?" she said, and he had never seen so venomous a look. "Just somethin' you pick up once in a while like a toy doll."

"A damned expensive toy," he blurted out. "Oh, Flora, what the devil's the matter with you?"

She began to pace the room. "I don't like bein' a toy, even an expensive one!" There was something to Flora he had never known, the General thought. But of course he should have known it, the strain of panther in her. He watched the sly sensuousness of her movement.

He threw back his head and laughed. "Come here, Flora! I never loved you as well, my girl!"

She stopped and whipped the trail of her negligee from where it had twisted around her ankles. The garment fell open and she was very nearly naked. "If I come, it's not because I'm lovin' you, but 'cause I'm owin' you."

The General dropped his eyes. He got up slowly and put on his overcoat without a word. They had had quarrels before, but never on this level. There was but one answer, she no longer needed him. Nick Casey was not so far away, after all. Flora flung herself on the studio couch then, face down, and began to weep. A really sordid scene, the General thought, adjusting his hat in the mirror. He did not want to seem to hurry, but he felt a certain urge for haste, nonetheless. There was not much point in his being heroic when their affairs had come to such a pass. He started violently at the ringing of the doorbell. Flora too started up. The parakeet made such a racket, she needed to throw the sheet over it on her way to the house phone.

"I think it's Nick Casey," she said, her hand over the mouthpiece. But automatically she was pressing the buzzer to admit him.

"Is there any other way for me to leave here?" he demanded.

Flora nodded, waving to the window. "The fire escape."

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The General tried to recall an occasion when he had been here in daylight. The window looked down on some sort of court. He sat on the windowsill and swung his legs out. She was all but pushing him.

He held the railing and took his first step down. The whole contraption sagged and he came near pitching forward and down.

"Be careful, Ransom," Flora cried, and immediately closed the window between them.

His temper warmed him then to the task of his descent. It was, after all, but three floors. On the second he paused and without thinking what he was doing, stared inside. A woman looked up from where she had been polishing her toenails. She gave a scream and leaped for the phone. The General moved gingerly, and the ladder rode down to the ground beneath him. He found the passage to the street that brought him out a few feet from the building entrance. There at the door of a black limousine—double parked—waited the two lads who had tried to pick him up coming out of Robbie's.

Thank God he had put the Jaguar in a garage. He retreated into the court again and looked for another exit opposite. Finding it, he looked up at the window from which he had made his departure. She had even pulled the blind! Oh, what a dissembling witch, his Flora!

The General was making his way out of the court onto another street when he heard police sirens. Perhaps to rescue the lady with the unfinished paint job on her toenails? How would Mr. Casey feel, hearing the sirens? Would his boys drive off without him? Perhaps he too would depart via the fire escape! The General was almost tempted to wait and watch. Police cars were converging from all directions. Then he was struck with the vulnerability of his own position. He skipped out into the street, sprinted the hundred or so feet to Third Avenue and then slowed his pace. He went into the next bar for a drink. Suddenly he wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was an astounding thing, but he had come within an ace of arrest as a Peeping Tom!

In the morning the General fell asleep again after he had been called. He had spent the night at his club, and with a rare sense of fellowship for the men he usually thought dullards, he had stayed up too late at cards. He woke with the peal of the phone bell: "his broker's office"—that was Flora. He refused the call. He needed then to have a Turkish bath, and all in all, he was pressed for time at breakfast. He could but glimpse some one else's discarded paper and he tore from it the pages carrying two items, one of which at least he intended to fully savor later:

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Nick Casey, a figure prominent during the crime hearings, had been picked up for questioning as a Peeping Tom in the courtyard of an East Side apartment. The woman who at first swore he had appeared twice on her fire escape, later withdrew the charge, when a neighbor affirmed Casey to have been with her at the time. Casey said that he had left the apartment of Miss Flora Tims in such an unconventional manner on hearing her doorbell ring. He had not wished to embarrass her, an unmarried lady.

The General made a clucking sound and stuffed the page into his pocket. And Flora had the nerve to call him at the club that morning! She had used their usual ruse, of course . . . his broker's office calling. Just the same it was crude of her.

The other item concerned Jimmie: they were out for his hide already, poor boy. The district attorneys of three counties were cooperating in the effort to pick up Johnny "The Rock" Rocco, old time rum-runner, who was wanted now for questioning about the Manhattan killing in 1948. . . . The General paused and placed the date for certain; it was during Jimmie's term all right. Oh yes, the newspaper had made the same calculation: "During the administration of James Ransom Jarvis, an indictment was sought against Rocco, but for reasons now under investigation, was never brought. Jarvis, who has since served in the United States House of Representatives, is prominently mentioned as a likely candidate for governor this year."

Poor boy, poor boy. Well, it was the price one paid for the privilege of public service. The General pocketed that page also, but he put its matter out of mind for the time being. He needed all his wits to confront Augie Fowler within the hour.

The agent kept him waiting no longer than it took to finish a phone call. There was rather more pomp to his manner than usual, the General thought. He was what Mrs. Norris would call "a weatherable man," meaning that he could smell in the wind something to his advantage.

"By the way," he said, gesturing the General into a chair, "you're to call your broker's office."

The General grunted his thanks. Flora, obviously, was in a hard way to get hold of him. How canny of her, to have found him here. That was not quite like her. "Well, shall we get down to business?" he said.

The agent nodded. "What have you got?"

"A most extraordinary thing, Fowler, an unpublished diary of a president of the United States."

"Frankly, the only kind of diary I could stir up interest in right now—well, it would have to come

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out of my lady's chamber, if you know what I mean."

"Precisely," the General said.

The agent looked at him to be sure his meaning had got across. "Okay. Let's have a look at it."

"Oh, it's far too precious to cart around. But let me read you a few passages which I have transcribed. This, you understand, occurred while he was ambassador to England. The lady in mention is of a house still prominent in English nobility, by the way . . . which I don't suppose need inhibit us eh?"

"Read, read," Fowler said, with an impatient wave of his hand.

The General selected a provocative passage naturally, and glimpsing an actual glint of greed creeping into Fowler's eyes as he listened, he wished that he had long long ago turned his hand to fiction.

"You know," Fowler said when the General pocketed his sample, "we could feed bits of this—without names, probably, to the columnists. Whet the public interest. It might start some bidding before ever we submit to publishers."

"My own humble sentiments," the General said, and they proceeded to discuss the length and further content of the diary. The old man listened carefully. He wanted consistency as well as flexibility for his future action. And finally, cautioning both himself and the agent, he said: "Of course we shall want to keep our dignity in this. Nothing vulgar. And I must consider Jimmie and his career."

"I was just wondering about him," Fowler said. "How does he feel about the project?"

The General shrugged. "Neither one way nor the other."

"In other words, you haven't confided your . . . discovery to him." The agent grinned. "I've not invested in your post-military career for nothing, General."

"It's time some of the profits went back into the firm then," the General growled. He wondered if Fowler suspected the true composition of the diary. It would be just as well if he did; he would not dare say so, and a little caution there might edit his own exuberance.

"As soon as there are profits, General. When do I get to read this book of revelations?"

"Want to see it in manuscript?"

"Preferably not—but someone will have to authenticate it, besides yourself."

"Of course! And someone will damn well have to pay for its transcription."

"I can probably manage that," Fowler said dryly. The General got to his feet. "It's too bad," Fowler went on, taking him to the door, "this Rocco business just now. Tell me, was Jimmie really on his way to the governor's office, or was that press agentry?"

"Jimmie Jarvis *is* on the way to the governor's office, Fowler."

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"Then you don't think Rocco's murder will seriously hurt him?"

"Rocco's murder?"

"That's the way I heard it on the radio this morning. Seems like he got taken on an old-fashioned ride, black limousine, the works."

"A black limousine?" The General again echoed Fowler's words. His brain seemed full of lightning thoughts, and not a one he could hold onto. "I'll be in touch with you later, Fowler," he murmured, and made his way quickly out and to the street. There he bought the latest edition of the papers. The Rocco murder was headlined. He took all the papers back to his club to read.

Jibber-jabber, most of it, all middle without head or tail, showing clearly but one thing, the bias of the paper: the story was slanted against Jimmie or in his defense, but every newspaper account pointed out the connection between the gangster's murder and Jimmie's political fortunes.

It was a matter of some curiosity, the General thought, that Nick Casey owned a black limousine. And while he, the General, had seen it on Manhattan's east side after ten o'clock, he, the General, also knew that the distance between there and the Red Hook district of Brooklyn, where Rocco had been seen getting into a limousine at midnight, could be driven in less than an hour. He had done it himself not much earlier.

Very interesting.

The club lounge was filling up, the luncheon hour approaching. Another call came from his broker's office. Flora was very persistent. This time he said he would call within the hour. He moved to a solitary place by the window. It was interesting, too, that by a strange combination of circumstances, Casey himself had the most honorable of witnesses as to his whereabouts at midnight: he was in a police station pleading innocent to charges of prurient spying.

Oh yes, he must soon call Flora. But first he must call Jimmie, poor boy. The General drew a deep breath and with it caught in the fragrance of flowers. Carnations he thought, and looked about for the vase. True enough, green carnations. What a perpetration, turning to bilious green nature's loveliest bloom. But of course, tomorrow was St. Patrick's Day.

The General put through a call to Nyack. It was Mrs. Norris who answered. "Well," he said, "how did you find your family? Or better, how did you leave them?"

"You no doubt want to speak to your son," Mrs. Norris said, and it would have taken a hatchet to crack the ice in her voice. Surely Robbie had not betrayed him?

"Hello, father." Jimmie's voice sounded straining with tolerance.

"I'm sorry for all your trouble, my boy."

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"Then maybe you'll tell me what you were doing in Brooklyn last night, father."

"Brooklyn?"

"The District Attorney's men got your licence number. They are not unreasonable in the conclusion that either you were there—or I was."

"But, but," said the General, "you have witnesses to where you were, don't you?"

"It so happens that I was home alone, here in Nyack, that I expected a phone call which I deliberately did not answer when it came."

"I'm sorry not to have been there, my boy. I was at my club most of the night as a matter of fact. I spent the night here. I want to help you every way I can, you understand . . ."

"All right, father, stow it. Are you going to review the parade tomorrow or not?"

"Would you doubt it? I'd march for you if I had but one leg."

"You won't have to march," Jimmie said wearily. "Now listen to me. I've engaged rooms for us at the Mulvany Hotel, adjoining rooms. We'll be right on Fifth Avenue. You can check in any time you like. I'll have Mrs. Norris pack your things and I'll bring them. Here's Mrs. Norris. Tell her what you need . . ."

The General cleared his throat and named a few items she was to pack for him. Plainly he had walked into something foul yesterday, up at least to his pockets. And it was just as plain he had to get out of it quickly or else pull Jimmie in with him. He probably needed the help of a confidential investigator, and for that he needed money. He took the small bag of toilet essentials he kept at the club with him, got his dispatch case from the safe, looked to be sure the diary and ink were in it, and went to the Mulvany Hotel. A private club was not private enough for some transactions.

He debated with himself while awaiting the preparation of his room, which of his calls to make first and decided on Fowler. Having a dime, he made the call from a public phone. He caught the agent on his way out to lunch, and came directly to the point: "Augie, for one thousand dollars cash this afternoon, I am willing to sign over to you one half my interests in the diary."

There was a long pause before the agent spoke. "Where is the diary now, General?"

"I will deliver it into your hands by five o'clock this afternoon." Long before then, he thought, he could make the entries of his and Robbie's composition.

"Then I will make you a personal loan against the publisher's advance on the property, General. However, the customary ten per cent of your earnings on it will satisfy me."

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"You are an honest man, Augie."

"In some things I suppose I am," the agent said dryly. "See you at five."

The General decided he had better do his copy work immediately. There was an unsteadiness to his hand he did not like. With more stress it would not improve. He took a warm bath, came from it relaxed, satisfied as to his ability to do such exacting work, double-bolted the doors and set to the task. Only when it was finished did he turn to the other call he had to make. Flora seemed a very long time answering.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NOT for a moment did Jimmie believe that the district attorneys of three counties were out to get him, and he told Mike Zabriski as much that afternoon. It was one thing to reopen an investigation for political purposes, but quite another to pin a murder on a man.

"I wouldn't say that was being done to you, young fella," Mike said.

"The afternoon papers come mighty close to it."

"Bread and butter headlines," Mike said. He pointed to the phone on his desk. "Try the General again."

Jimmie swore softly and dialed the Mulvany Hotel. It was the third time he had tried to reach his father, having had to go himself directly to Mike's office to a Party executive conference. Again the hotel switchboard reported that General Jarvis was not taking any calls. What really worried Jimmie was that his father might have been trapped into some sort of complicity either by flattery or the lure of money; he was always in great need of both. Jimmie shook his head.

"I don't see much point in doing anything till you get that straightened out," Mike said.

"There's one thing needs to be found out if they don't already know it," Jimmie said, "what Rocco has been doing lately."

Mike nodded his head ponderously. "I guess you know I've got an informant in the D.A.'s office?"

"I know such characters exist," Jimmie said.

"It's a funny sort of business they haven't really got hold of—it looks like he's been running a protection racket for bookies."

Jimmie whistled. "No wonder they haven't got hold of it. It's too hot." After all, who did bookies need most protection from? The police. Jimmie got up and rubbed his hands together. "Mike, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to offer my services as a special investigator to the D.A.'s office." Mike nodded approval. Jimmie asked: "What do you say we

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give that to the newspapers?"

"Better see first what comes out of this meeting," Mike said, getting up, checking his watch, and leading the way into the conference room.

A hasty session of the Party executives in New York at the time had been called. They sat now, their eyes downcast. Jimmie wondered if he would be ditched there and then. But all that happened was that a policy chairman, pro tem, was elected, through which activities and news releases affecting the party must be cleared. In other words, Jimmie thought, from now on, he must live as though even moths and flies had camera eyes. How poetic a thought! His champion of the hour was Madeline Barker. And since, as well, she was put in nomination by Mike for the chairmanship, and the move to close nominations was made by the Judge, Jimmie certainly could not oppose her. But he remembered well her behavior at Albany. And Helene's remark about blackmail . . . . he had not had the chance to pursue that. Well, she might be a fragile Barker—Miss Madeline, but she had got herself a convoy of some mighty sturdy old men-of-war.

She approved his offering of his services to the District Attorney, but with one qualification: "unless your father—the old dear—is implicated."

If his father—the old dear—was implicated, Jimmie swore, taking a cab crosstown to the Mulvany, he intended to know it within the hour. The bags he had sent ahead were already in his and the General's rooms. The old dear had answered his bell for that all right. Jimmie watched the clerk get him the key to 517. He was about to turn away when he saw the key lying in the next box. "Doesn't my father have room 519?"

"Yes, sir," the clerk said, glancing at the box. "The General seems to be out at the moment."

"Without leaving a message for me?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"Or word as to when he would return?"

"No, sir, no word at all."

Jimmie looked at his watch. It was almost five. He would have liked very much to get on with his investigative offer today, so he sat down to sweat out his father's return. When the General had not returned by six, Jimmie called his club. He was not there. At seven Jimmie called Mrs. Norris. She had not heard from him. Jimmie promised to call her back. By eight o'clock Jimmie's anger was being tempered by concern. The more he thought about it, the more he realized how little he knew of his father's activities. He was reasonably sure the old boy had a mistress, but both he and his father respected each other's privacy. It was, Jimmie thought grimly, the only possi-

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ble way they could live together. He wondered then if Mrs. Norris would know. She knew a good many things she considered unmentionable. He called her again.

"Do you think he has a friend he might be with?"

"Now and then," Mrs. Norris said, "I've taken a call to him from a woman who said it was his broker's office calling. I think it was her called this morning. Remember, I told you? She hung up when I said he wasn't home."

"I remember," Jimmie said dully. It was a matter he would have to drop there. "Did he take you to Brooklyn yesterday?"

"He did not. I thought of that myself when I heard he was there. He didn't want us to know where he was going."

"And obviously he doesn't want us to know where he is now," Jimmie said. "All right, Mrs. Norris. I'll call you later."

Jimmie asked to be paged if the General came in and went to dinner, which he did his best to linger over, because the prospect of waiting in his room was too terrible. In fact, leaving the dining room at a quarter to ten, he made up his mind that he would have to take some action if he had not heard from his father by eleven. Jimmie stopped at the desk again. Instinctively, Jimmie looked at the key box, room 519. His father's key was not in it.

Jimmie all but exploded. "Is General Jarvis in his room?"

"He is, sir," the clerk said frostily.

"I asked to be informed . . ."

"I beg your pardon, sir, you asked to be paged if he called. He was in no condition to speak to you, sir. Out of consideration for you, and our other guests, I thought it best to have him taken directly upstairs. He abused me horribly."

"That's some satisfaction," Jimmie murmured, and started for the elevator. "What time did he come in?"

"An hour ago, perhaps," the clerk said, glancing at his watch.

He would never be governor, Jimmie decided in the elevator. Wherever he found them, he must call stupid men stupid, and all of them had the vote. Or, perhaps, thus would he come to office! When the only justice was poetic. He knocked on the door of 519. No answer. "Father, I've had enough nonsense," he said, trying to make his voice carry without raising it. He knocked harder on the door. Still no answer. He tried the door. It was locked. He went around to the door of the bathroom which they shared. He hammered and all but kicked it in. To no avail. He called the desk then and asked the clerk to send up the passkey to 519, and when the clerk protested, Jimmie suggested that he send the house detective along with him; the old gentleman might have had a heart attack.

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He went out in the hall to wait. The house detective came, put his key in the lock and glanced up at Jimmie. If the door had been locked from the inside, the key was not in it. The detective turned his passkey, withdrew it, and gestured Jimmie to proceed.

Jimmie threw the door open. The detective shone the beam of his flashlight about the darkened room. It caught the old man. He was awkwardly slumped over the back of a chair, as though he were hanging onto it, and yet in such a position that gravitation would seem to demand that he fall.

Jimmie ran to him while the detective turned on the wall switch, flooding the room with light. The minute Jimmie touched him, the old man tumbled to the floor. He was dead.

Dead, Jimmie marveled, wearing all the decorations befitting his rank and service. It was as though he had come upstairs and prepared himself for the next day's duties before allowing himself to die.

Though he bear the shame of it to his own grave, Jimmie had to admit to himself at least that, listening to the house detective call the Medical Examiner's office, his first thought was: it's too much to expect of General Jarvis, a plain, simple heart attack.

Everyone, without saying so to him, seemed to share the view; men came from Homicide and precinct headquarters. Royalty could not have turned out more press representatives. Jimmie was glad, however, to see George Fallon, the District Attorney, and even more pleased to see in his company, his chief investigator, Jasper Tully, whom Jimmie trusted. Tully had served under him and many a D.A. before him and after him: he was forever shuffling his politics—easily shaking out the jokers for the next deal. A long, lean melancholy man, he had never to Jimmie's knowledge raised his voice, though many a man he had set to screaming by his silent scrutiny.

Jimmie shook his hand affectionately and then turned to the D.A. "You know, Fallon, I was only waiting to talk to my father, tonight. Then I intended to volunteer my services . . . on the Rocco business."

"Looks like charity can begin at home now, doesn't it? Fallon said, and then bethought himself that he was speaking to the dead man's son. "Sorry, Jarvis, but damn it, man, we were waiting, too. Just to give you the chance to make the first move. We purposely quashed the information that your father got in our line of fire last night, and that's trouble for us in some quarters, sitting on something worth a headline."

"Thanks," Jimmie said. It struck him than that the old man would not again get into anyone's line of fire, and the blow hurt.

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Tully understood. "He was always a swell target, the General." He laid a bony hand on Jimmie's shoulder.

Jimmie gave him a wink and squared his shoulders. "Let's talk some cold facts, gentlemen, just we three. I don't know what my father was doing in Brooklyn—if he was there. Now I'll have to take your word for it. I'd feel a lot better about that if I knew the full story on why the sudden interest in Johnny, The Rock. The truth, Fallon: was it politics?"

"I don't mind telling you most of the truth. Won't give you names though. A couple of public investigators, we'll call 'em, wanted to dig through the records. I've let people with poorer credentials search them. I knew by the dates what they were after, but I'll tell you something, Jarvis, it hit both Tully and me between the eyes when they came up with the name Johnny Rocco. Johnny's had his name bantered around a lot in our circles lately on account of some very large bookmaking. In Brooklyn, true. But that's not far enough away for us to relax. They've been pulling raids regularly over there, the D.A.'s men, and getting peanuts. Peanuts for the monkeys. Now you and I know that no good cop likes to be made a monkey out of. Comprenez?"

Jimmie nodded. He had got the same story from Mike: the suspicion of the police themselves. "That's bad stuff," he said.

"That it is. So you can see, Jarvis, how it was that when they said 'sick 'im' to me, I put my best hound dog on the trail. It was your friend Tully here who spotted your father last night. He was working out of the Brooklyn D.A.'s office. Fill it in from there, Jasp. I'd like to hear it again myself."

Tully gathered in his legs and folded his hands. You could perish waiting for his first word, Jimmie thought. "The D.A. had a couple of leads over there, so when I showed up to help they decided to stake 'em out last night. Three of their boys and me were posted outside a little one-arm restaurant called Minnie's on Water Street."

"What time?" said Jimmie.

"We set up about seven, figuring the collector would show before ten o'clock. And after the first hour we were dead sure we had something: in all that time one customer. Two roast beef sandwiches he took out with him. So we just sat, four of us outside, Minnie inside."

"Do they always go in fours over there?" Jimmie asked.

"I don't know that, but there was a couple too many of us all right as it turned out. The car wasn't marked, and there was other cars, but this round-faced goon sure spotted us. It went off like a string of firecrackers. This fellow was coming to us on the run, don't know where from, we picked up

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the sound of his feet hitting cement first, and I knew at the same time there was a car coming fast. When I open the window this cheese face hollers: 'You want Johnny Rocco? Go get him!' He was shouting because just about then the Jaguar goes by like a Jet out of hell. Our driver had his foot on the accelerator, but we never got any closer than the minute I got the license number, and it hit me right then maybe the car was the decoy, and the moon-faced guy the real collection man. By the time we got back he was gone, of course. Keystones, bloody Keystone cops they made of us."

Jimmie could see the famous melancholia settling on Jasper.

"It was routine. I put a tracer on that license number, Jimmie. I knew it was RO—Rockland County; in fact that's what made me think we'd been decoyed." Jasper scratched his ear. "Funny, RO—Rockland County. Ro, Rocco. He was a great guy for sports cars, too. He left a sweet little Austin-Healey in front of the bank last night."

Jimmie thought about those implications. "You never picked up The Rock's trail at all then?"

"Nope. Not till we saw him on a slab in the morgue this morning."

"Do you suppose your father could have been used as the decoy, Jarvis?" the D.A. asked.

"God dammit," Jimmie exploded, "he was a general in the United States Army!"

"Maybe he was covering up for somebody who got in trouble," Tully said softly. "There's a lot of times respectable people get mixed up with mobsters. Say they like the horses. Did he have lots of money?"

Jimmie held up his hands. "If my father had owned the state of Texas, gentlemen, he could still have managed to be out of funds by any given weekend. That is why, unfortunately, I have to speak slowly when I defend him."

"How is Mrs. Norris?" Tully asked, having a sudden association with someone who also spoke slowly when it came to defending the General.

"She'll be in tonight, I suspect," Jimmie said. He looked at his watch. "Eleven-twenty. It's taking them a while in there, isn't it?"

Both men shrugged, as though casualness best explained it.

"Finish up your Brooklyn fiasco for us, Jasper," Fallon said.

Tully looked at him mournfully. "Well, it wasn't ten minutes till we got back to Minnie's. Minnie never saw or heard of Moon-Face, of course. Matter of fact, I never did either. I went through the gallery today and I couldn't find him. Anyway, it wasn't another fifteen minutes till Minnie closed up and went home. That was twenty minutes to nine. And he did go home, I dropped out and tailed him myself all the way to his television set.

"I picked up the boys in front of Rocco's house later. In fact all four

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stakeouts wound up there at midnight. At three o'clock we knocked off. Eight hours of nothing. And just about that time the beat man patrolling the First Federal Bank on Fulton Street came on the Austin-Healey at the curb, motor still running. He checked the bank, nothing happening. Went back, turned off the ignition. Forgot about it. They're going to give him a wooden medal tomorrow. And here's another nice touch: at seven-fifty this morning his relief man ticketed the car for illegal parking."

"Where did the papers get the 'black limousine'?" Jimmie asked.

"A drunk claims to be a witness. He was sitting in the precinct station when it broke this morning. Said he tried to tell a cop about the guy he saw being shoved into the black limousine on the same corner, near the bank last night. Even gave the cop the license number, nice simple number, Jersey license plate. The only trouble, he must've juggled the numbers. No such combination issued."

One hour and twenty-one minutes after hanging up the phone in Nyack, Mrs. Norris flailed her way through policemen and reporters to the desk of the Mulvany. The taxi had cost her ten dollars and she had made the driver earn it. In the moment's politeness she now allowed herself before interrupting, she realized that the clerk was accounting to the police the General's staggering state of inebriation.

"Young man! I don't believe your generation knows the difference between a stagger and a swagger." She addressed herself to the policeman with the notebook then. "I assure you, Officer, General Jarvis never staggered in his life, not once since he got out of rompers." And to the clerk again: "What's the room number?"

"Five-nineteen. But you can't go . . ."

"Ah, but I can," she said, and did. She was passed from the door of the General's room, however, to Jimmie's, and there Jasper Tully admitted her. Jimmie rose to meet her, and caught her in his arms when she lunged at him like a tumbling sack of potatoes. "The poor old gentleman," she said, and meant it.

Jimmie introduced her to the District Attorney, Fallon, and then asked, "Do you remember Jasper Tully?"

Tully pulled himself to his best height.

"Most of him," Mrs. Norris said, needing to lift her head to look into his face.

The men laughed, but Mrs. Norris looked at Jimmie solemnly. "And to die a spectacle in a public place," she said under her breath.

"Now that's not quite so, Mrs. Norris. As a matter of fact, father came upstairs and somehow managed to bedeck himself in full re-

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galia for tomorrow's review. There's something rather desperately heroic about that, isn't there?"

"Ah, lad, he was a good man when it came to his country. Did he have his medals?"

Jimmie nodded and Mr. Tully pulled at the lobe of his ear, a habit he had at moments of registering something to remember.

It was not long then until the Medical Examiner came in. He had found nothing to indicate that the General had not died from a coronary attack, but in view of the hotel employee's account of his drunkenness—Jimmie and Mrs. Norris exchanged glances on this—he thought an autopsy was indicated. It would show the justified degree of intoxication, and as well it would reveal if anything in the nature of a drug had been administered to him. At this Mrs. Norris nodded her head in approval, unseen by anyone save Tully.

Jimmie agreed entirely. The funeral would be set for Monday. Meanwhile, he agreed also that it was best for the police to give the General's room the usual treatment where there is a chance of murder, especially since the two unidentified people who had brought him home, a man and a woman, had accompanied him upstairs. It was decided also, that since there was an accommodation available, Mrs. Norris should stay the night at the Mulvany.

Mr. Tully then addressed himself to her: "While the boss and Mr. Jarvis are winding up their business, would you do me the pleasure of a cup of tea and a bit of talk?"

"I would dearly love the cup of tea," she said bluntly. In the elevator, she tried to remember what she could of the detective from Jimmie's days as his superior. "Do you still live in the Bronx, Mr. Tully?"

"I do," he said, pleased that she remembered. "With my sister, you know, me being a widower fifteen years."

"Ha!" she said. "I'm widowed over forty years myself. A sailor he was, lost at sea."

Downtown, Mr. Tully put his hand beneath Mrs. Norris' elbow and steered her toward the drugstore. It was the only place of non-alcoholic refreshment open at that hour. "Kind of different," he murmured, "not like the hotel we were just at."

The brightness of the chromium-streamed shop was a shock after the sedate softness of the Mulvany's lobby lights. Mr. Tully ordered tea for two with a double order of tea bags, and sat opposite her in a booth. He had to apologize for knocking into her with his bony knees. His legs were hard to arrange in close quarters. And looking into his deeply lined face, Mrs. Norris wondered if ever she had seen a man so homely.

A little twitch trembled his eyebrow. "Am I wrong in thinking

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you would debate the General's being drunk?"

"Him being as drunk as that prig of a desk clerk said, oh yes. I would debate that. He was a man of uncommon experience in many things, including the bottle."

Tully nodded. "Of course if he was sick now, that would be something else, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose. But he had a hold of himself, if you know what I mean, Mr. Tully. He wasn't one to dribble his frailties like a mewling child."

Tully drank deeply of the scalding tea. He was as leathery inside as out. "And he did have a spray of eloquent abuse for the desk clerk as he accounts it," the investigator said. "A perplexing affair altogether. It wouldn't bother me half so much, you know, if the two who brought him home weren't so skittish. Would you mind sitting in while I talk with that clerk, Mrs. Norris? I don't think it would hurt a bit to give him an extra going over tonight."

The clerk complained of having already told his story to the precinct men and a man from Homicide. Also, he was due to have gone off duty an hour before, having come on at noon.

"Then you were here when General Jarvis checked in," Tully remarked.

"I was."

"Sober?"

"I do not drink, sir."

Tully sighed. "Was the General sober, by those exemplary standards of yours?"

"Perfectly."

"And when he went out again, a few minutes before five wasn't it —was he sober then?"

"I was busy then, but there was nothing abusive in his manner." The young man smoothed his hair.

"So we come to the General's return—when he was abusive. Between eight-thirty and nine, and roaring drunk. Isn't that what you said?"

"Loud drunk," the clerk qualified, with a look at Mrs. Norris that seemed to credit her with the qualification.

"Could he stand up?"

"With difficulty. And his companions were almost as drunk."

"Ah yes, the companions," Tully said. They were sitting in the manager's office, the three of them, the clerk on the edge of his chair. "Why don't you relax a bit and tell it—say, the way you will when you get home tonight."

"If I get home tonight, I shall go straight to bed, sir."

"Too bad," Tully drawled. "Tell us about the woman with the General."

"Well, I'd say she was oh,—I can't judge a woman's age . . . old young or young old!" He fussed with his hands, describing the inadequacy of his speech.

Mrs. Norris leaned forward.

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"Do you know what a flapper was?"

"Exactly!" the clerk said. "Thank you very much, madam. And I thought she had a crying jag on at first. In fact she as much as told me she'd been crying. You see, the General upset me terribly with his profanity—just standing there, letting it fall out of his mouth like. I couldn't stand to look at him." The picture made Mrs. Norris and Tully exchange glances. "I gave the precinct officer a verbatim account. You don't want me to go over that again in front of the lady?"

"God forbid," Tully said.

"And the, the flapper—when she got his key, she said: 'He's been sayin' things like that to me all night, so don't you pay him no mind.'" The clerk imitated her drawl.

"Sounds like a southern lady, don't it, Mrs. Norris?" Tully said.

Mrs. Norris nodded, and bit her own lip. It sounded like a voice she herself had heard once or twice before, and once that very morning: "Tell him to please call his broker's office," with the "please" sort of drawn out. "Do you mean to say he wasn't able to walk up and get the key himself?" she asked then.

"Maybe he was able if you say so, madam, but he just stood there leaning on the man and said: "Give the lady the key to my suite you unspeakable — unspeakable —unspeakable."

"Any witness besides yourself?"

"Oh, yes. The telephone operator, Miss Matson. There were guests in the lounge. Our clientele are not the kind to stare. I didn't want to delay him. I gave her the key immediately."

"The man—what would you say he does for a living?" Tully asked.

"Why . . . a salesman, I'd say. Gadgets, maybe to penny arcades. Or maybe juke box records."

"Kind of sharp, huh?"

"Not sharp exactly, but terribly hep."

"All right, my lad. Let me have the key to Mrs. Norris' room, and we'll give you the green light for home."

"You're very lucky, madam," the clerk said, when they had gone out to where his relief man was on duty and got her the key to 512. "There's only the one room vacant on five."

"It's queer, some people's notion of luck," Tully said, rocking back and forth, his hands in his pockets. "I heard somebody the other day sympathizing with the bad luck of English hangmen. They're going to be out of work soon."

The clerk gave Mrs. Norris' key into the detective's hand, and looked up at him with a truly cherubic face. "I dare say they'll find other employment when they get to know the ropes, sir. Good night."

Tully's face broke into a slow

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smile. "Bullseye," he said. There was nothing in all the world as unpredictable as the human being, he thought.

"Excuse me, young man," Mrs. Norris laid her hand on the clerk's sleeve. "Just one more question. You've been very patient. Was the General carrying anything?"

"I didn't think so madam. But the lady was, I remember it now: a black sort of case, maybe twelve inches long. If I were asked to speculate, I'd say a half dozen steak knives."

Mrs. Norris nodded. "It was the General's medals," she explained, thinking he deserved to know it. "So," she said, as much to herself as to Tully on their way upstairs, "he didn't get them till the last minute."

"Did he keep them in a safe?" Tully ventured.

"They were as often in a pawnshop as they were at home. And I was thinking to myself coming in in the car tonight—it would take a particular type of merchant to loan much money on them. Their metal worth can't be more than a few dollars."

"That will bear looking into," Tully said. He put the key in her door, tried to turn it, and discovered the door already unlocked. He was unostentatiously careful, lighting the wall switch, and looking over the room, not wanting to alarm her. Only a forgetful chambermaid, he decided, and put the key in Mrs. Norris' hand. "Goodnight. I hope we meet again soon."

When Mrs. Norris lifted her head to speak to him, a scent of perfume wafted under her nose. She caught the detective's arm and crinkled her nose as she sniffed about the room. Tully then got a whiff of it, too. Without a doubt someone wearing perfume had been in the room not long ago, and they both remembered the operator's remarking that he could smell the scent of the General's companion after she had left the elevator. Questioned now, he could not even smell perfume in the room, much less identify it. Tully could understand that: it was illusive stuff, perfume. Nothing you could put back in the bottle when you'd had enough. Checking with the weary day clerk, he learned that it was not at all possible for the perfume to have belonged to the chambermaid. "In fact," he said, "very vice versa."

Tully regreted having to do it, but he got the girl out of bed to answer the phone. She had been in 512 about eight-thirty, a last check of towels, ashtrays, etc. and she was in the habit of leaving the door open while in a room. She remembered turning off the lights, locking the door, hanging her key inside the linen closet door until she went to the maid's room and changed out of uniform, a matter of maybe five minutes' time. Then, as was her custom, she took the

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key ring downstairs to the desk and went home for the night. She had not heard or seen any activity at 519—almost across the way—to arouse her curiosity.

"Well," the detective said, although nothing in the room indicated the presence of the General's last known companions except the findings of Mrs. Norris' nose, "they were here all the same, I think. And they borrowed her key to lock 519. The General's was inside on the table. Too clever, I'd say, for respectable folk. Looks like they figured on police and reporters cluttering up the halls. They probably just stood in here and waited, could be with the door open a crack. All of which doesn't mean much, except it seems like a lot of precaution to take just because you brought home an old friend drunk. Don't you think?"

Mrs. Norris nodded, her eyes filling with tears of wrath, frustration and sorrow. Tully patted her hand with awkward solicitude. "I don't suppose he ever mentioned her name in your presence?"

"He did not, the old sinner."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mrs. Norris awoke with so violent a start she gave herself a headache, and contrary to her habit, had to lie abed a few moments to get her bearings.

As soon as she put her feet into her slippers she picked up the phone and ordered tea sent up to her and a pot to knock up Master Jamie with as well.

Having refreshed herself with a wash, and the beverage which if it lacked the flavor of tea at least profited by the intention—it was hot—Mrs. Norris called Brooklyn. It was Mr. Robinson who answered the phone, and he was a long time giving her the opportunity to inquire after her sister.

"I was going to call you this very minute, Annie," he started. "The poor old gentleman. Was it a heart attack?"

"Heart failure," she said.

"Uh-huh, uh-huh. It's what we all die of, eh Annie? But him it took sudden. I don't suppose you know yet if he left you anything. Don't misconstrue my meaning now. I wanted to tell you there's a home waiting you here with your sister and me . . ."

That would be the day, thought Mrs. Norris. "Thank . . ."

"Not a word of thanks. It's our natural duty. Was there anyone with the poor old gentleman at the end?"

He could pause long enough when he wanted an answer, she thought, and let the quiet air hang between them until he demanded, "Are you there, Annie?"

"I am. Is Mag there?"

"I thought for a minute we were cut off. The service is not what it used to be, say what you like about

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mechanical devices. The dial business is not like an operator. Was I rude to you the other night, Annie? It's bothered me since."

"You were not rude to me, Mr. Robinson, but if I was Mag. . . ."

"Ah, I'm glad of that. I have a terrible temper, you know."

"Mr. Robinson, will you stop chattering like a magpie. I have but a minute and I want to speak to my sister."

"Oh, I'm very sorry, Annie. She's out, I think. For a bit of air. She says the only time you can smell the sea is in the early morning, and you know how Mag is for a pure breath of the sea."

"Then I'll call her later in the day, Mr. Robinson."

"Couldn't she call you?"

To say just what he wanted her to say, Mrs. Norris thought. Oh, there was something wrong there all right. "I may not be near a telephone," she said, furious with herself that she could not better cope with him. "Goodbye, Mr. Robinson."

Beware a man with a glib tongue, she thought to herself, hanging up. What a dislike she had taken to him in the last week, and after a lifetime of toleration. It was the way he had spoken to Mag the other morning that finished it. Coming in at three a. m. with tracks the size of horseshoes under his eyes. And Mag creeping off to bed at one lash of his tongue. Not Annie Norris if he was her man. And now telling her that Mag was out for a sea breeze at eight in the morning. There was no doubt—he was not the gentleman she had always thought him.

Jimmie stood, teacup in hand, looking down on Fifth Avenue, the green stripe running down its middle through the early traffic. Wherever over the world they were, Irishmen were gathering, and wherever democracy had sanction, the politicians had stayed up the night to help plan the celebration. St. Patrick's Day in the morning.

Jimmie drained the teacup as the phone rang.

"This is Helene, Jimmie. I am very sorry about your father's death. I hope there is something I can do—that you will let me do."

"Thanks," he said.

"Are you hurt that I left you at the restaurant the other night?"

"Not at the moment," Jimmie said, quite as sharply as his father might have spoken under similar circumstances.

"I guess I deserve that," she said. "Jimmie, there is one thing you must understand for now. More later, but just now—Judge Turner and I were not strangers. I knew his daughter a long time ago."

It must have been a long time ago, Jimmie thought, remembering that he was himself in law school when she went to live in Paris. He could not even remember her name now. "Helene . . ."

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"Yes?"

"Later today could you drive Mrs. Norris to Nyack—in father's car—if the police okay it?"

"I'd be pleased to."

"I'll call you in a couple of hours."

"Jimmie . . . you are very dear to me."

"Thank you, Helene. Thank you very much." He hung up the phone and swallowed down the little lump of rather sad pleasure. Like an adolescent, about once a month he fell in love all over again. Except that in his case it was with the same woman.

Mrs. Norris gave a thump on the door that made him leap for the bathroom. She was soon maneuvering the breakfast cart into the room and setting up the table. At least she had been sensible and was herself having breakfast with him, she and a great tablet and pencil. The efficiency of the women in his life was frightening.

Jasper Tully arrived in time for coffee.

"Seems like there was something in what you said, Mrs. Norris," Tully started, "about the General's drinking habits." The preliminary report of the Medical Examiner was in. "One or two drinks was the most he had last night. Even on an empty stomach, that wouldn't make him dribblin' drunk, would you say?"

Both Jimmie and Mrs. Norris shook their heads.

"Which leaves us with the possibility that he was their prisoner and doing a very corny act maybe at gunpoint," Tully said.

"Why?"

"Jimmie, I used to tell you when you were in office, first you got to settle on *what*. Then maybe you have a chance of finding out why."

"What suit was he wearing?" Mrs. Norris asked in the silence that followed Tully's lesson.

"He was wearing the grey tweed when we found him," Jimmie said.

"He wore his dark blue into town," she said.

"He did," Tully confirmed, consulting his notes. "Furthermore, during this trip he wore both suits to the same . . . house. They're both in the laboratory, and both had bits of blond hair. They must know by now whether Angora cat or human."

"I could tell them and I wouldn't need a laboratory for it," Mrs. Norris said with a shrug. "I never knew a cat to run a brokerage."

Mr. Tully cleared his throat.

Poor father, Jimmie thought. "That was a little joke between them, I suppose," he said looking at Tully. "It seems when she called him, she would say it was his broker's office."

"I know," said Tully. "I was talking to people at his club this morning. You remember the clerk saying she was carrying a box, Mrs. Norris?"

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"I do, the box I believe with his medals in it."

"A fair assumption, and we're assuming, too, he put them on before he died. But now here's a curious thing: the medals were all mixed up. I forget what each one is called, but the man I asked knows all about these things, and he says the arrangement was like wearing a Good Conduct medal in precedence over the Congressional Medal of Honor."

"Then she put them on him!" Mrs. Norris cried.

"Dead or alive?" said Jimmie.

Tully nodded. "That's the question, lad. That's it. Maybe the lab will turn up something, but not yet. The Medical Examiner says he died between seven and nine. I think we could be more exact ourselves. But maybe not. The tests are all under way, however. So you can go ahead with plans for the funeral. By the way, The Rock's being laid away in old time splendor this afternoon, Jimmie. The boss thought you might like to go. He'd be glad to have you drive out with him."

"Thanks," said Jimmie, not especially keen on spectaculars. But this one, he thought, he had better take in.

"Now," Tully said, "I'd like you to go over the contents of the General's pockets and suitcase with me."

"Will you need me?" said Mrs. Norris hopefully.

"We will," said Tully. "You're quicker witted than the both of us."

The right coat pocket of the General's blue suit had contained two folded pages from the early edition of *The New York Chronicle,* March 16, according to the notation of the police property clerk.

Mrs. Norris needed to overcome a certain reluctance to look at these things which had meant something special to the General. It was like peeping through a keyhole, and with that thought her eyes rested an instant passing over the "Peeping Tom" story to concentrate on the feature of the page as Jasper Tully's bony finger pointed it out—the plans for the St. Patrick's Day parade, including the General's name amongst the very important people to be in the reviewing stand.

The other page, they saw, accounted the pickup order out for Johnny "The Rock" Rocco.

"It seems curious at first, him being interested in that," Tully said, "but down a ways there's your name, Jimmie, and that could be it."

Jimmie nodded, took his father's wallet from the next box and opened the money compartment. He looked twice and then took the money out, each bill separately, and put it on the table, Mrs. Norris giving a small "Oh" at each one hundred dollar bill. Nine of them

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there were, as well as a fifty and some singles.

"Did you give him all that, Master Jamie?" Mrs. Norris said with deep reprimand.

"I did not. I gave him fifty dollars, two twenties and a ten."

"Well, one thing would look to be clear from it," the investigator said, "If he was murdered it was not for his fortune. Plainly the intention of the pair that brought him home was not to roll him."

But there was nothing else of any value except the parking receipt for his car, a garage on Second Avenue and Sixtieth. The garage stamp indicated that the car had not been moved since Thursday night.

"That's quite a ways from his club," Tully said, "which makes you wonder awful much what it was close to."

"Can we have the car now?" said Jimmie.

"I think so," Tully said, picking up the phone. "I'll check and be sure."

Jimmie turned to his housekeeper. "There's someone I've wanted you to meet for a long time, Mrs. Norris, a very dear friend of mine, Helene Joyce. Mrs. Joyce will drive you home—if the car's available."

"How nice," Mrs. Norris said, and brushed vigorously at her dress. It had been her opinion that for a long time he'd been wanting her not to meet Mrs Joyce. If she didn't watch her Master Jamie it would not be long before the old man's shoes would need resoling. "When do you want me to leave?"

"As soon as you're packed," Jimmie said shortly. He had no patience now with her tantrums.

"Yes, sir," she snapped, and flounced out of the room.

"My God," Jimmie said, when she was gone, "almost a thousand dollars. Where did he get it, Jasp? And in crisp hundred dollar bills."

"There's two possibilities come to mind," Tully said, "a bank—or the horses. All things considered, his Brooklyn jaunt and all that mess, this time, Jimmie, my boy, I'd bet on the horses."

As it turned out, Helene was not at all what Mrs. Norris had expected. She looked like a working woman for all her delicate features. Her hand, given with a will on their introduction, had the hardness about it—not roughness but firmness—of competency. Indeed, something inside Mrs. Norris gave a sudden turn, like her soul to the wall. Here was a woman she was going to like in spite of herself, and a woman, she did not doubt, who once she got her foot in the house in Nyack, was likely to bring the other in after it and close the door.

Mr. Tully drove them to the garage. There he identified himself and countersigned the release order. The Jaguar was in plain

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sight, having been the object of much attention. The technical men had been over it.

"When did the General leave the car?" Tully asked.

"Eight-fifty, sir, Thursday, March fifteenth."

"Were you on duty?"

"Happens, sir, I was."

"Then you know positively it was General Jarvis and not someone else who parked it?"

"Yes, sir. It was the General. Him and I often conversed."

"The car has been here since?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he in the habit of parking here?"

"At least once a week, sir."

"Overnight?"

"Yes, sir. Sometimes longer. A day or two that is."

"Ever deliver the car to him?" Tully fired these questions, quite unlike his slow-moving self.

"To his club on Thirty-ninth Street."

"Damnation," Tully murmured, slowing down. Then he was off on another attack. "Did you ever see a lady with him?"

"No, sir, though I thought he had one, if you don't mind me saying so."

"Thursday night, did he have any packages?"

"He was in a hurry, sir. I wouldn't say the General was ever frightened, but there was something on his mind. He was quite fidgety."

"Did he have any packages?" Tully hit again. He never asked a question that he did not get an answer to, however much gratuitous information was volunteered him in between.

"Yes, sir, but I can't remember what. I remember him carrying something. . . ."

"Master Jamie's dispatch case!" Mrs. Norris cried. "I remember now him borrowing it in the morning!"

The attendant was nodding his head. "Yes, ma'am, a dispatch case. Like a thin suitcase, and I remember gold initials on it."

"Completely irrelevant," Helene said, "but I gave it to young Mr. Jarvis last Christmas. The initials are J.R.J."

Tully gave the boy fifty cents and told him that the ladies would take the car. "I suppose it could be at his club, the dispatch case," he said then to Mrs. Norris. "Would you have any notions at all as to what was in it?"

She shook her head. "Off and on he's been composing his memoirs. Oh, and I do know he's been rummaging in the attic amongst the family papers for the last week or so. You might just ask Mr. James about it."

Tully nodded and held the door for Mrs. Norris. "Safe home, ladies." The two women entered the car as the two men quickly departed. Mrs. Norris gave Helen a poke. "Drive on!" she cried.

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CHAPTER NINE

A WALLET full of money and a missing dispatch case, Tully thought, as he sat in the car with his notebook in front of him, and the Jaguar's exhaust smoke still in his nose. He tried to blow it out. Roaring little stenches, he thought. They must tell as much of the man who owns them as, say, his handwriting. His own bet of the moment would be that the General's hand was no firmer than smoke, than it had been when he was thirteen years old.

He opened the notebook to a fresh page and began making a timetable from his notes, beginning from where he, of his own knowledge, could begin. He wrote:

Thurs. Mar. 15, 8:15 PM—
Water St. Brooklyn.
Thurs. Mar. 15, 8:50 PM—
2nd Ave. & 60th, Manh.

He drove then to the General's club, and again was let known they found him a nuisance—because, he thought, in his day the General had been such a nuisance. But this time he saw the people he had missed in his early morning call. He was then able to proceed with his timetable:

Thurs. Mar. 15, 10:40 PM—
club, 39th St. near Madison
(clerk put dispatch case in club safe)
Thurs. Mar. 15, 10:45 PM—
whiskey at club bar.
(conversa. with Webster Toll who caught 11:13 train for Darien)
About 11 o'clock to card room.
Friday, March 16, 12:45 AM—
left call at desk for 9 AM
(can presume went to bed)
9 AM—took call.
9:05 AM—refused call fr. Broker's office.
9:30 AM—breakfast in dining room.
(waiter gave him papers, apologized not latest edition.)
9:50 AM— left club, on foot.
11 AM—returned to club.
1. Call to Nyack.
2. Call to Plaza exchange.
3. Refused call from broker, but gave message—will call.
(note order)
12 noon—took dispatch case from safe.
12:20 PM—checked in Mulvany.
Needed to wait in lobby few minites till room ready. Thought to have made phone call.
Requested switchboard not to allow calls through till he said so.
4:45 PM—call to Eldorado exchange.
4:50 PM—left hotel with dispatch case, wearing tweed suit.

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(took bath afternoon sometime)

Near the end of a busy day, Tully thought, looking over his record, and just as near the end of a busy life. There was only one big gap in the timetable—from 8:50 when he was at Second Avenue and Sixtieth, and 10:40 when he was at Thirty-ninth and Madison. How did he get from one place to the other? He might have had time to walk, but probably not the inclination. At headquarters, Tully requested a man be put on the cab possibility. He checked with Homicide on what the lab had turned up in the General's car. Nothing, not even the smell of Brooklyn; in fact less than nothing; on the handle, right side, there was no hand or fingerprints at all; clean, wiped clean.

Very, very curious, Tully thought. The General had driven Mrs. Norris in from Nytack Thursday morning, and Tully would give heavy odds that she was a door handle clutcher. Even if she weren't, there had to be some prints on it; the handle of the other door was a smear of them. Someone had deliberately wiped the right one clean.

A gangster's funeral was always an embarrassment to decent society, but especially to a clergyman. Listening to this one bend all his eloquence toward ambiguity, Jimmie thought it would be a good idea for him on such occasions to recite Mark Antony's "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him" speech and let it go at that. "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones . . ."

"I never saw so many Homburg hats," Fallon said, "and look at the cigars lighting up, fifty centers—three for a buck the cheapest."

"We live in prosperous times," Jimmie said. He was watching the license plates of all the great black cars—to small purpose, but he could not help but wonder if Johnny The Rock had not had his last ride-but-one in one of them. "It's a *Who's Who* of the underworld, isn't it?"

"And every goddamned man of them has accounted his whereabouts while Johnny went bye-bye," the D.A. said.

"Now that's remarkable in itself," said Jimmie, "don't you think?

The D.A. grunted. "You should hear some of the alibis. Nick Casey was trying to get out of a Peeping Tom nab in night court."

"Did he make it?"

"Only when he got his girl friend in for corroboration. His defense was very funny. You should hear old Henny tell it: 'For Chrissake, Judge, what'd I want lookin' in a window at some dame in her bare feet? I got a whole row of 'em on my payroll, and they don't

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wear nothin' but a piece of string!"

The last limousine pulled out into the cortege, white with purple trim. "Sic transit Rocco," Jimmie said.

"Born Giuseppe," the D.A. said. "Well, that's one way to get deported." He looked at his watch. "Want to take a look at that joint on Water Street?"

"Very much," said Jimmie, but wishing fervently that it was not one of the last places his own father had been seen alive.

It was mid-afternoon when they drove up to Minnie's Diner. In the daytime Minnie had the appearance of being legitimate. There was at least a stack of dirty dishes in the sink which the restaurant keeper was tackling himself. There were, however, three telephones in the place—a fact so obviously suspicious that Jimmie thought most investigators would discount it.

Fallon ordered coffee and made no secret of his identity. "How come the three phones, Minnie?"

"One for me, one for my customers . . . and one for you. You want to make a phone call?"

"Pretty cool," the D.A. said, the sides of his mouth down.

"You got jurisdiction in Brooklyn?" Minnie asked, and Jimmie thought he'd been put through the works in the past couple of days.

"I've got friends here," Fallon said.

"Me, too. In a pig's eye."

"Was Johnny Rocco a friend?"

"If he was, I'd be at the funeral," Minnie said.

They were getting nowhere and not very fast either, Jimmie thought, and when he got the chance, he asked the man how long he'd been in business in the neighborhood.

"Since my wife died," he said. "That's going on two years. It was her place, see, but I decided to try and make a go of it. A man's got to make a living."

"And what did you do before your wife died?"

"Five years at Sing Sing, and you know it as well as I do, damn your souls! Now get the hell out of here and come back with warrants if you want in. The one thing I learned up the river was all about my rights!"

It was not very easy to leave Minnie's with dignity after that, but to make a show of it, Jimmie stood at the curb, his topcoat open, his hands in his pants' pockets. He scanned the neighborhood: The Tower Foundry and Iron works, Schwartz's steel bearings, Robinson's Printing. . . .

"Let's go," Fallon said. "We're not going to get anything out of that baby."

"Right," Jimmie said. "But mark my words, Fallon, that boy is clean. An ex-con who wasn't could not afford the luxury of kicking a D.A. out of his place."

"Minnie can't afford it either," Fallon said grimly.

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CHAPTER TEN

"THERE are messages coming from all over the world," Mrs. Norris greeted Jimmie when he reached Nyack toward evening. "And a basketful from Washington. Mrs. Joyce has been answering the phone all afternoon."

"I suppose there'll be people tonight," Jimmie said.

"By the tens and hundreds. Would you like a drink in your room while you dress?"

"Couldn't we all take time for one in the living room?"

"Your father's been laid out there."

"Oh," said Jimmie, "of course, I'll have it upstairs."

The smell of flowers permeated the house. It was heathenish, Jimmie thought. He beat his retreat upstairs as soon as he could. Mrs. Norris had managed to rub a bit of Presbyterianism off on him.

"She's a plainer woman than I thought," the housekeeper said, the door closed behind her when she brought the whiskey and ice.

"If you mean Mrs. Joyce, I think she's beautiful."

"I mean there's no fancy trimmings about her. She speaks her mind and thinks straight."

"Oh," said Jimmie. "That she does. Mr. Tully will be here soon. He'll be spending the night."

"And my sister and brother-in-law are coming. Where will I put Mr. Tully?"

"In father's quarters. That's how he wants it."

Jimmie wondered, dressing, if there had been any discussion between Helene and Mrs. Norris to warrant such a suggestion. He drained his glass and paused on his way downstairs to see which room she had put Helene in. It would tell better than words Mrs. Norris estimation of the woman. It could not have been higher. The light shone from beneath the door of the north bedroom, and if he was not mistaken, it was from there that the smell of wood smoke was coming: the housekeeper had lighted the fire in the grate. Jimmie tapped on the door.

"Come!"

He opened the door a bit and stuck his head in. "Are you decent?"

"If clothes will do it, enormously. Come by the fire—or the window. I'm torn between them."

"I'm not," said Jimmie, taking her in his arms and holding her close. The kiss was long and soft with but the faintest stirring of passion at its end, so that Helene withdrew and took his hand to lead him to the window.

"It's changed," she said, speaking of the river with the sky's color on it, "from when last I looked."

Jimmie looked at her only. "'How many loved your moments of glad grace . . . The sorrows of your changing face.' Damn. I've forgot a whole patch of that."

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Helene smiled and squeezed his hand. "The peoples' candidate. You are an egghead, Jimmie. What will they do to you?"

"I don't even know what I want them to do to me. It all seems so long ago, that afternoon in Albany. I wanted very much to be governor then. Now I want the leisure to live a little, quietly, and hear wood fires crackling and remember full poems and not snatches of them. And I want terribly to make love to you."

"We are both so vulnerable to each other now, darling."

"Does love hurt you that much, Helene?"

"I have been looking at the face of someone out there. I loved a boy and lost him, and a man loves me whom I respect and whom I yield . . . Jimmie, there is something I must tell you about Madeline Barker and the Judge."

"You have no idea," he said with all the cold hurt he could manifest, "how much jollier I'll find that story with a drink in my hand. I'll be in the kitchen with Mrs. Norris. When your boy out there disappears, you might like to join us."

Helene lifted her chin and did not move or speak until he was gone. Jimmie could not have felt more miserable; he had thought this sort of thing was over between them, the raising of ghosts whenever he neared the subject of matrimony.

Jimmie went to the living room to greet the early guests and finally made his way to the kitchen. Mr. Tully had arrived and was warming his hands at the grate. Helene was slicing bread.

"The course of true love never does run smooth," the investigator was saying over his shoulder, and unaware of Jimmie's presence.

"To say nothing of the course of false love," Jimmie said.

Tully screwed his ugly head around and squinted at him. "What, my boy, is false love—is there such a thing?"

Jimmie was hooked on his own hasty cast. "Love of self," he said, somewhat steadying his position.

"Oh, that runs smooth as butter," Tully said. "The trouble is it never gets a man anywhere. Now as I was about to say, it seems the General and his fair lady had a tiff after he rushed home to her from Brooklyn. He couldn't have got there before nine, and at ten-twenty-five he was on Third Avenue and Fifty-first Street where he caught a cab down to his club."

Jimmie repeated the address, and that of the parking lot—Sixtieth and Second. "There's a lot of city in there, Jasp."

Tully nodded. "One side or the other, he did a bit of walking. Then when he got to his club he complained at the bar to a gentleman named Webster Toll, that his fair lady had refused to go on a trip with him."

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Helene put the bread in a basket and suggested they eat something before more people arrived. Tully finished his account at the buffet. "The General wound up saying he wasn't jealous, that it was beneath him to be jealous, certainly of a man like that. Now who would you say he was talking about?"

Jimmie shook his head. "It could have been anyone."

"Well," Tully said, "that cancels out another afternoon's work." He looked around the table, the buffet . . . "What kind of a family is this, a wake without a drop of whiskey?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Norris, "I was getting the ice when you came."

"Never mind the ice," said Tully with a wink at Helene, "it's already broken." He lifted his glass when they all had one: "To the old gentleman. God rest him. Whatever else he's done to it, he's certainly brought some new light into my life."

"I think I can say the same," said Mrs. Norris, and God knows it was true, she thought. It was only Thursday on her way to Brooklyn that she was contemplating how little exciting ever happened to her nowadays. And right now she could truly say she had not felt better in many a long year. But thinking of Brooklyn she was reminded of the Robinsons. Poor Mag . . . Strange until Thursday, if she admitted the truth now, since almost the day she met him, she would have said, "Poor Mr. Robinson."

Helene and Jimmie drank and ate without comment.

"I remember him when . . ."

"Do you remember the day he . . ."

"Let me tell you about when he came back from . . ."

Such were the whispered commencements to conversations all over the house. A military guard had taken up the watch, and the living room, the library, the hall, the stairs were crowded with people remembering the General and the various milestones of his busy life. It was a great tribute to the old man, Jimmie thought, that there was more subdued laughter than letting of tears.

He was on the stairs himself, his arm in the clasp of an ex-envoy to Sweden, when what he called "the political contingent" arrived. He had expected Judge and Mrs. Turner, but for them to come in the company of Big Mike Zabriski and Miss Barker seemed poor taste to Jimmie. But then taste was an uncommon word in politics. Jimmie found for the diplomat a contemporary with whom to share reminiscences, and went down to Mrs. Turner who opened her arms to him and gave his cheek a tearful kiss.

Jimmie took the hand Madeline Barker offered him. But in the

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middle of her sympathetic gaze her eyes caromed off his cheek and fastened on someone behind him. She excused herself and as he turned, he saw her make a mercurial journey to Helene.

Mrs. Turner was watching also. "So she's here, too," she said.

"Mrs. Joyce is a dear friend," Jimmie said.

The Judge was solicitous to his wife. "Madeline will manage, my dear," he murmured; and practically in the same breath so that Jimmie had no opportunity to speak his annoyance, the Judge went on: "Touching story in the afternoon papers, Jimmie, about your father's managing his medals before dying. Very like him, don't you think?"

"Rather," Jimmie said.

"You didn't know your Mrs. Joyce and I once were intimates, did you, Jimmie?" Madeline smiled as he excused himself to the Turners and joined them.

"I may have heard it and forgotten," Jimmie said coldly. He was wondering at the moment if ever she had written anything on a subway wall.

"You haven't really changed, Helene. Only I have changed," Madeline mourned.

"It is hard to discern it with chameleons," Helene said. "And long ago I ceased to care. Only you and the Turners cherish painful recollections. Poor Jimmie, he doesn't know what we're saying."

Madeline threw back her head as though to laugh, but remembered in time the occasion of this meeting. "You mean to say you haven't told him of our Bohemian days?"

Jimmie was distinctly uncomfortable. It was like two women undressing before him; one at a time would be interesting, but two was nihilistic.

"I don't cherish mine with that much affection," Helene said. "I lost something very dear to me."

"So did the Turners," Madeline snapped.

"But look what they gained in you, my dear. To lose a daughter and gain another?"

"For God's sake put away your arrows," Jimmie said.

Helene laid her hand on his arm. "No, Jimmie. Let's count them now, but not in front of all these people. Couldn't we go into your study?"

Jimmie did not like to take them there. It was a place he wished to keep inviolate. But he had little choice. Nor was he placated much when both women paused in their baiting of each other to compliment him on it. He lit cigarets for them and filled a pipe for himself. "I can't stay long," he murmured.

Helene smiled. "Like they say, that's the story of my life." She lifted her head: "Very well, I shall be both brief and blunt. When I was an artist's model—more years ago than I care to number—I had

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a friend who ran away from her high-born kinsmen, from a house that was as cold as her father's justice. Her name was Margaret Turner. And she had a college friend named Madeline who doesn't belong in the story yet except for a chance introduction. Margaret and I shared everything—including my assignments as an artist's model. After a while I was married . . . common-law we called it, but in my mind it was binding. How ironic it is, when I think of it now, that I am the one accused!"

Helene got up and started to pace back and forth. Madeline watched her rather as though she thought she might plunge for escape. Jimmie pulled at his pipe.

"Perhaps you can guess the rest, Jimmie? I was faithful to the faithless. I lost the husband to my friend, and both of them to Paris, where as the story goes, they are living happily ever after." She whirled around on the other woman. "Now comes Madeline, a veritable Joan of Arc. Perhaps you'll account your contribution?"

"It's very simple," Miss Barker said, "I was the one who told."

"Not that simple, it isn't," Helene said. "She came searching for her friend to me, and soon pretended herself my friend, and got the story from me. The Judge paid you, didn't he?"

"Many times over," Miss Barker said, and there was something in her way of saying it that touched Jimmie as nothing she had ever said in his presence had.

"The trouble was she did not use the word 'wife' in my instant, when she told the story to His Honor. I was all blame—and I had no papers, no wedding words to prove my honor. In other words, Jimmie, I took the rap for corrupting the Judge's daughter. In time he got a copy of a French wedding certificate to look at, the bona fide Mrs. Gregory Joyce. But she would not come home to her parents' house. And Madeline would not leave it. She had bought herself a home at the expense of my reputation."

"Now things have greatly changed," Miss Barker said. "Your reputation could buy you almost anything."

Jimmie swore a violent oath beneath his breath.

But Helene shrugged. "That does not even anger me any more, but now you know why Judge Turner sent you home to bed, Jimmie. I am not good company. In fact, I am still unclean in spite of the fact that he took me home with him that night and tried to fumigate me. How does the song go—'wash me in the water that you washed your dirty daughter?' . . ."

"I don't get it," Jimmie said.

"'. . . And I will be as pure as the whitewash on the wall.' Now do you get it?"

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"No!"

"He asked me if I would like a fellowship to work in England. He has much admired my work, you see," she said with mock naiveté, "after all these years, and out of the work of all the sculptors in America, mine deserved a fellowship . . . created overnight."

"It was a legitimate offer, Helene, and not created overnight," Madeline said quietly. "The endowment relates to a small estate outside London. I once administered it."

Jimmie got a start then that made him glad the women were attending only each other at the moment. His first personal encounter with Madeline Barker had related to England after the Albany meeting. Jimmie looked at the woman who was calmly watching Helene move about like a restless panther. Very sure of herself, Madeline Barker, much in control. He got to his feet and caught Helene's hand in his, drawing her to some ease at his side. The hand was cold and damp, and he was reminded of the feeling when someone has long dangled her fingers in the water from a boat. He lifted it to his lips, the public display of affection costing him considerable discomfiture.

Madeline looking from him to Helene smiled a little and dropped her eyes as though deeply hurt. That really embarrassed him. She looked up again immediately and fiercely. The softness had been but a moment's lapse. "Mrs. *Joyce,*" she said, and her voice sounded choked up, "What touching loyalty to a lost cause, your having kept that name for all these years." She got to her feet. "That makes you almost as pitiable as me. I'll be forty-five soon, Helene, an acknowledged spinster." She looked a moment at the doorknob before putting her hand to it. "In that regard, I do believe the only difference between us is the light in which we have conducted our affairs. Goodnight, all."

"Now there," said Jimmie as the door closed on her, "is a witch if ever I saw a broom."

"No," Helene said, slowly, "I do believe the years have touched her with humanity. I think she is in love with you."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MRS. NORRIS hung up the phone and sat down heavily. Mag was not feeling very well. "I've put her to bed, Annie. No more than her stomach, I think. She'll be fine in the morning."

Oh, a very cheerful man was Mr. Robinson. But the fact remained, she had not seen her sister, nor heard her voice, since the morning at three when Mr. Robinson came home and ordered

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Mag to bed when she questioned where he had been all night.

And then of course it could all be her imagination, considering the things going on in this house.

Mrs. Norris jumped when Tully spoke to her. "I thought you were out of the way for the night," she said.

"I wondered if you could use any iodine," the investigator drawled.

"If I could use any or if I have any?"

"If you could use some. The old gentleman had three bottles of it, and by the looks of it, all bought at Shea's Drug Store recently. You don't think he had in mind trying suicide?"

"No more than I would," she said.

Tully shook his head. "What on earth would a man buy three bottles for?"

Mrs. Norris shrugged. It was too much for her mind in its present condition.

"There's something else I've been wanting to go over with you," Tully said, "If you're not too tired."

She made up her mind then to concentrate on what he was saying. "Go ahead, Mr. Tully."

"When the General arrived at his hotel last night with his fair lady and the other one, do you remember what he said to the clerk?"

"Something profane, wasn't it?"

"But besides that. I got the exact transcript from the precinct man. 'Give the lady the key to my suite, you so-and-so, etcetera.' Now the General didn't have a suite. He had a room. And if I'm not mistaken, he was the kind of man to call a room a room, eh?"

She put one finger on Mr. Tully's hand where it was resting on the telephone. "Was he hypnotized, do you think?"

"That's the line of inquiry I'm about to pursue. The troublesome thing about it—he was a man of such strong will."

"He was strong enough willed, as you say, Mr. Tully, but there were times he didn't have much won't."

Mr. Tully put in a call to New York to a psychiatrist of his acquaintance. It was possible for the General to have been hypnotized and set in a drunken pattern—except that, having never been slobbering drunk himself, he would probably over-act.

"He'd probably over-act," Tully repeated for Mrs. Norris' benefit. And that was certainly what he had done.

Tully started upstairs again. "Think about that iodine," he added, pausing, "was he accident-prone, as they say?"

"He was very steady, Mr. Tully, the nerves of an aristocrat." When he was gone, Mrs. Norris picked up the phone herself and called Shea's Drug Store, inquiring when the General had bought the iodine.

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No one knew, and checking the Jarvis account the clerk discovered that the purchase had not been charged, although the old gentleman was in the habit of charging everything.

"Indeed he was," Mrs. Norris said to herself, taking the information up to the detective. "He never paid for a thing he could get on tick."

"More of his aristocratic ways," Tully said. "But it's on the label: Shea's Drug Store. You're a perceptive woman, Mrs. Norris. Thank you for the information." He entered a note in his book. He then pointed to the portrait without raising his head. "Who's that?"

"That, Mr. Tully, was once the President of the United States."

"He looks it," Tully said, "I've been going over the old gentleman's memoirs. I have to do that, you know, looking for clues."

"They're not in my keeping."

"I'm sure they're not, from what I've read," Tully said. "He has snatches of all sorts of tales written out on separate pages—as though he thought to patch them together like a puzzle. It would make quite a book, you know, though by his notations there were things about people he didn't dare publish."

"Were there?" she said. "I wonder, Mr. Tully, I often ask myself, did some of the things he talked about really happen, or did he exercise his lively imagination?"

"The General was thinking of bringing out an edition of the President's letters. I've put out an inquiry of all the major publishers —including the one which contracted for his memoirs. None of them gave him a thousand dollars."

"That's what I was wondering," Mrs. Norris said.

"But I'm still waiting for his agent to call me back. Seems like he got a sudden urge to go fishing. I wouldn't think so much of that except he had to buy a rod, a reel, boots . . . the works. His wife says it's the first time he ever went in his life. Now that isn't a disease that comes on a man sudden, Mrs. Norris. Well, we'll see in a day or two. Maybe he'll come back for the funeral. Keep your eyes open there, Mrs. Norris. Look out through your tears and see who else is watering the old fellow's grave."

BY EVENING of the next day, Sunday, Tully had learned very little more of General Jarvis' intimate life than he knew when he came, of his recent intimate life, that was. The study was strewn with accounts of "the old days," but the detective could find no reference to anyone who answered the description of the woman who had brought him home to the Mulvany. No surprises at all, Tully thought unhappily, unless it was in the General's handwriting:

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the detective had been wrong about that thinking it probably childish. The old man had written an elegant hand, neat and controlled. Tully had consulted an expert on hypnotism. For the present he could see no purpose to consulting the hand-writing experts. They were not a lot to inspire confidence anyway. A carnival sort mostly.

The detective was sitting in the study chair opposite the President's portrait at that moment. A queer feeling came over him. He was by no means a supersitious man, but at the instant it was like fifty years being snatched from his own life: he could have sworn he heard someone saying, "You're getting warm."

Why the devil should he think of a childhood game . . . here? "Excuse me, Mr. President," Tully muttered, half-jest, half-earnest.

There was a knock at the door and Tully's reverie was over. Jimmie came in and introduced the man with him, August Fowler, the General's literary agent.

Fowler shook hands perfunctorily and then made quite a business of staring up at the picture. "So that's him. I remember seeing the picture in my seventh grade history. American History, seventh grade. Or was it eighth? Interesting looking face, don't you think?"

Since the question was asked of no one in particular, no one answered him. Jimmie told the investigator: "It seems father came on a diary of the President—not as dull as we had thought his life might have been. Fowler, here, agreed to submit it for publication."

"You know, Jarvis, it would be a fine idea for you to go ahead with what your father planned—write an introduction. Good for you too."

"In what way?" said Jimmie. "Is it a secret you plan to run for governor? It was no secret to your father certainly. He told me about it."

Tully had been watching him while he talked. A sharp forty-five, he decided, a press agent who had taken a post-graduate course and got himself a literary license. "When did all this happen, Mr. Fowler?"

Fowler jerked his head and, as though the cat had spoken to the king. "Oh, yes. I'd forgotten. You are the police."

"*A* police," Tully amended. "When was it you last saw the General?"

"May I take it from the beginning of the diary episode?"

"Why not?" Tully drawled. "Take it from a chair, too, if you like." He gestured the man into one of the General's easy chairs. Jimmie half sat on the desk.

"On Thursday night he called me at home," Fowler started.

"What time?"

"After nine. We had dinner

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guests and were just leaving the table. I suppose you'd like to know where he called from?"

Jimmie merely raised his eyes and Tully drawled: "What makes you think so, Mr. Fowler?"

The agent looked from face to face and then leaned back. "Why, before the General came into my office the next morning—on an appointment we had made over the phone—I had a call for him. It was from . . . his broker's office. And I think we are agreed, gentlemen, that General Jarvis did not have a broker?"

Tully noticed the little muscles of anger working at Jimmie's mouth. This guy was too familiar, too smooth, too much the son of a bitch. "I'm not sure I'd agree to that," Tully said, "Would you, Jimmie?"

"Not at the moment, I won't," said Jimmie.

"I beg your pardon," Fowler said. "Let's put it this way then: *I* don't believe he had a broker. Not with a southern accent asking for 'Ransom' on the phone."

That was a score and no doubt of it, Tully thought. "As a matter of fact, we would like to know just where the General was Thursday night, Fowler."

"Now I'm in a funny spot," the agent said. "Actually, I don't know. I thought I had the phone number, but I couldn't find it today when I looked for it. You see when he called me, I asked to call him back and jotted down the number. I do know it's an Eldorado exchange."

Tully nodded. More confirmation. That was all. But he made a note. The General had called EL at a quarter to five from his hotel room. Now at least they could place exact limits on the area where the fair lady dwelt: within the Eldorado Exchange.

"I was not in very great hopes of getting anything special in the way of a manuscript."

"And did you get something special?"

"I wouldn't say so," the agent pursed his lips. "Still, it's not dull . . . as some of these things are. I was pleasantly surprised."

"You really feel you can get it published?" Jimmie said.

"As I told your father, I should like to try. There are what is known as prestige books. As a matter of fact, I should like to proceed. With your permission. No hurry of course, I don't suppose another hundred years would make much difference."

Hurry up and stand still, Tully thought. "Did you bring it with you, the diary?"

"No. It's in my office safe."

Suddenly mighty precious, Tully thought, for something that laid in an old trunk for a hundred years. "Just what are the royaltics on a thing like this liable to come to?"

"Possibly no more than a thou-

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sand dollars advance," Fowler said. "If they caught on—they have a sort of archaic splendor, you might say,—they might make all of us a bit of money."

"Poor father," Jimmie said, thinking how long ago the old boy would have dug out the diary had he but known a scratch of its worth. "Did he press you for money, Fowler?"

Fowler made a deprecating gesture. "I wouldn't say that. I knew him well enough to be circumspect in my promises."

"Did he get any?" Tully asked bluntly.

"I am not in the habit of paying money before it's in the house," Fowler said. "I can't afford it."

That was not an answer, not absolutely, Tully thought. But he would wait a while and get at it another way. "When did he bring the book to you?"

"First was the ten o'clock appointment. He was at my office on schedule. We merely talked. I suppose you might call it a briefing. He spoke to me from a few notes he had written out. Quite eloquently. I said if he could make the introduction and commentary as good, and if the diary had the merit he thought, I would try to place it. He said then that he would bring it in that afternoon. And that is exactly what he did. At five o'clock, he brought it to my office. I saw him but a moment, as my secretary will testify."

"Why should your secretary need to testify?" Tully said, leaning forward in the General's chair.

"Wasn't General Jarvis murdered?"

"Not that we've been able to prove so far. But any such information you can give us would get full consideration."

"Oh, no. I've given you what I know." He seemed to be genuinely shocked.

"Was that why you went fishing, yesterday—thinking the General was murdered?" Tully asked.

"Certainly not. I had promised a friend a week ago. I was already in North Carolina when I heard that General Jarvis was dead."

"Didn't you read the paper yesterday morning?"

"I didn't have time. Nor the desire. When I take a vacation, it's complete."

"Anybody we know—your friend?" Tully said easily.

"I doubt it."

"Try us."

Fowler looked at him venomously. Plainly the agent liked him as little as the detective like the agent. "Wilson Dram, the writer," he said.

"I've been wanting to go fishing a long time myself," Tully said, "I understand from Mrs. Fowler you got yourself some new equipment. Get a good buy?"

"Not very."

"Where? so I'll be sure not to go there."

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"King's Mart on Forty-third Street."

Tully nodded. "I'll remember. I don't suppose the General left his dispatch case in your office?"

"No. But I remember him carrying it. Yours wasn't it, Mr. Jarvis? I remember the initials, JRM."

"It's mine, wherever it is," Jimmie said.

"I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Fowler," Tully said, getting up from the General's desk.

Fowler left without shaking hands.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE General's funeral was a magnificent pageant. It became an ancient warrior, some tribal chieftain, Jimmie thought, whose progeny would divide the kingdom and then war upon each other. And there, perhaps because the sermon was so dull in contrast to the setting, Jimmie thought for the first time of a will. The old man might not have had anything to leave, but he might at least have registered his good intentions. And it might carry the name of his mistress. But surely Jasper Tully had thought of that. . . .

The General's funeral was an insult to civilized man. Pomp and circumstance. There were flowers here by the bushel, there was a wreath you'd expect to see around the neck of a horse after he won the Kentucky Derby, Mrs. Norris thought. But at the cemetery when taps sounded, she dabbed her eyes, and for the first time remembered Mr. Tully's advice: watch who else is watering the grave. Glimpsing the cars nearest, from under her veil, Mrs. Norris saw a face in the window of a black limousine. She groped for the hand of Helene who was standing next to her, for her own heart had begun to thump. She gave Helene's hand a fierce squeeze, and pulled her close.

"Look at the woman's face in the car with the man at the wheel," she whispered. All the other chauffeurs were standing together.

In the time it took Helene to locate the car, the man had started its motor.

"They're going. Quick!" Mrs. Norris said.

But she was asking the impossible of Helene or herself at a graveside. Neither of them could very well pick up her skirt and run. Helene, however, was graceful enough to move without plunging, and quick enough to see the face of the driver: round as a moon with but a night or two's wane, and the color of yellow wax, like a faded sunburn. She could not see the woman at all. But she got the license number.

Mrs. Norris lingered at the grave long enough to ask one of the attendants if there was a card

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on the large gaudy wreath. There was none, but he remembered the man delivering it; brought it right to the cemetery, a fellow in a black chauffeur's suit that didn't fit him. Looked like he was going to burst it. In fact, he looked like he was going to burst his skin, a moon of a face . . .

When they got back to the house, Mrs. Norris called Mr. Tully at the New York District Attorney's office, and told him. She also gave him the license number Helene had taken, and promised to come into the city herself the next afternoon.

JASPER Tully had thought of the will. It was one of the things he had expected to see, spending Saturday night and Sunday in the country, and since he had been given carte blanche in the General's rooms, he had searched it out among the old gentleman's papers. A very simple affair it was: leaving both his assets and his debts to his only legitimate son, James Ransom Jarvis. It had been drawn up in 1945, and interestingly, initialed and dated in the presence of a notary once a year since. It was a blister of notary stamps. And the obvious intention was to show it as the one and only testament of Ransom Jarvis.

Meanwhile the detective had undertaken to do his own leg work, from broker's to broker's—the pawn shops of Eighth Avenue.

It was a long day's walk and the old man's mention of Eighth Avenue might well have been a figure of speech. Tully put his question for about the thirtieth time just when the lights were going on outside the shop. The man behind the counter—a great flabby lump whose face had the greyness of nightfall in it—opened his mouth and closed it. Then he shrugged.

Tully repeated his question, adding: "Seven decorations in all, including the Croix de Guerre and the Congressional Medal of Honor."

"I know," the man said wearily. "I can tell you the why of all of them, what he did to get 'em and how he got some of 'em for things which he didn't do."

Tully permitted himself a little sigh. "A talkative old fellow, eh?"

"A salesman, he should've been a salesman. You know why he talked, don't you?"

"More money?"

"That's it, my friend. Five dollars worth of tin and alloy and forty-five bucks of talk. I'm a sucker for talk."

"Did he give you much talk last Friday?"

"I got the talk when he brought them in. I got abuse when he'd take them out. He'd curse me out for a usurer, a flesh-bleeder. I wish you could hear the words, some of them I never heard, a foreign language."

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"Did he give you the treatment Friday?" Tully persisted, having in mind the old man's reported abuse of the desk clerk.

"Nope. You see he didn't come in for them himself. It was his girl friend."

"That's interesting," Tully said. "I've been wanting to meet her."

"Yeah? She ain't so much, not for a man of his . . . but what the hell? I used to think he was a four-flusher. Then he'd come in here, and by Chris', he did sound genuine."

"He was," Tully said patiently.

"I know. I read in the papers all about him. The real thing."

"Tell me about the girl friend. Do you know her?"

The big man settled himself on a stool behind the counter, maneuvering his bottom on it to get comfortable. Tully was aware of the ache in his own feet. "No, but I've seen her around, I think."

"You mean without the General?"

"Maybe, but I don't know where. What I mean is, maybe she's a ex-singer, something like that, see?"

"Could be she is," Tully said. "Got a name for her? Did she sign a receipt?"

The pawnbroker shook his head. "Cash, merchandise, tickets. No signatures needed. That's household finance stuff. We're specialists. She had the ticket, she got the medals."

Tully at least got a good description of the woman. It tallied well with the hotel clerk's. "What time was she in?"

"Along about now. I have to put the lights on special in the window, and I was up there by the switch when she came in. I saw her outside looking up at the number first."

Tully looked at his watch. Six-twenty.

"What did you think you were going to get from her?" Tully asked. "Or did you know her from having been in before with the General?"

"That was her first time, I think." The big man rubbed his chin and you could hear the scrape of his hard thumb on the stubble of beard. "Funny, you ask that. I got a beautiful watch here. It came in a week ago, a guy from out of town, green, scared. I figured she came to get it for him. Class, you see. Whatever she was, she had class. Not enough maybe for a general. But class.

"Just the same," Tully drawled, "you figured her to be . . . whatever she was."

"Oh sure."

"Would you say she was worried? Upset?"

"Not a care in the world, I'd say. Looked all around. Inquired what I fed the parakeet."

Tully noticed the bird for the first time. It would be a safe conjecture then, that the General's

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mistress was mistress also to a parakeet. Nothing at all so far indicated her a woman capable of violence.

"How much was the ticket? Have you got that on the books?"

The big man heaved himself up and went to his ledger. He found the page and ran a pudgy finger along the entries. "Forty-three dollars and fifty cents—including interest." He closed the ledger. "And I'll tell you what she paid it out of—a hundred dollar bill."

That was no great surprise. It merely toted up the General's pocket money to a thousand dollars.

Tully thanked him for his cooperation and clapped his hat on. He took a cab back to the office, and there, called up for the tracer on the license number Helene Joyce had got at the funeral.

"Sorry, Tully. Somebody goofed on you. There's no such number issued by the state."

Tully sat back and thought about that. Mrs. Joyce was a competent woman. But this was the second license number taken in this business that might have had great relevance: a drunk had memorized the license on the black limousine that took The Rock on his last mile, and there was no such number. Somebody was using plates of his own manufacture for these special occasions. And then there was the round-faced gentleman with the fading sunburn: he had put the finger on the General outside Minnie's that night, saying he was Johnny Rocco. He drove the limousine in which a fair blond lady attended the General's funeral. Maybe they wouldn't add up yet, but you could count 'em: one, two, three.

Jasper Tully enjoyed his dinner.

It was a strange, empty house, the Jarvis home in Nyack, full of clutter and petty chores. They were all her duty, Mrs. Norris said, but she heaved a great sigh of regret when Jimmie and Helene drove off to the city early in the morning. At the gate they turned back, and Mrs. Norris retreated in haste from the window not to be caught at it.

"Mrs. Joyce would be pleased to have you stay over tonight, if you don't mind a small room," Jimmie said from the door.

"Thank her very much," Mrs. Norris said, "If my obligations permit it, I'd be obliged."

It made the morning of tedious chores tolerable, and the truth was that she would have been glad to squeeze into a mousehole to spend the night in the city. She began sorting the household bills which she was in the habit of going over before giving to Jimmie to pay. The phone bill puzzled her—not that this was unusual—but there were two calls listed to her sister's exchange in Brooklyn on the same day, March fourteenth, the day be-

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fore she had ridden in with the General. She could remember the call to Mag to see if she would be home. Well, the Nyack telephone company was not the most reliable in the world. It was one of the last stands of the old-fashioned system, depending more on the human element . . . and they were all very human, the Nyack operators.

Again the feeling of having been over an identical conversation! She picked up the phone and asked for the supervisor, watching the while as the gardener trudged into the house and over the kitchen floor with his muddy boots. He would not do that in his own house, she'd wager. "Do you have to come in in your shoes? she cried, covering the phone.

The man clapped his hat on his head. "I found these all over the place by the east beds," he said, and flung a handful of muddy, rusting pen nibs on the table before her.

"What do I want with them?"

He was forever complaining of the things people threw in his garden beds; cigarets and matches, nails and buttons always seemed to be turning up there. Ordinarily she had a measure of sympathy with him, but this morning his trail of mud over the floor and the smear of it on her polished table set her near to screaming: "Get them out of here, Mr. Turpel, do you hear me!"

"Yes, madam." That was the Nyack supervisor. "Can I help you?"

"You can indeed," Mrs. Norris said, her wrath now compounded. "Whoever was making out the bill to Mr. James Ransom Jarvis was seeing double again, and it's not the first time. We are billed for two calls to Esplanade exchange, Brooklyn. Now it's my own sister who lives there and it was myself that made the call . . ."

"Are you sure, madam, there was but one call?"

"I am a careful woman with money, miss, and I would not make two calls where one would do."

"Very well, madam, we shall make the adjustment."

"Thank you very much." She then debated calling the Robinsons to inquire after her sister and say she would be over in the morning. She decided against it. This time she would surprise them. If Mag were only a little sick, she would be glad to see her; if she was very ill, she wouldn't care, and so far as Mr. Robinson was concerned, Mrs. Norris didn't care.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JIMMIE read the item in Lem Python's column twice:

". . . One thing sure, if a certain young bachelor about town is elected governor it shouldn't hurt

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our relations with Great Britain. Things already seem to have been très intime with a branch of the royal household. Been that is, as in bean, old bean in fact . . ."

So it was out, wherever it came from. His wartime escapade had been well observed by some camera eye. Madeline Barker's? He could think of no other. He was tempted to call her and blast her from there to the United Kingdom. He did not get the chance: she was waiting outside his office for him when he returned, and she was carrying a copy of *The Standard,* open to "The Python Pit."

Without a word they went to a conference room—the partners did not approve women in the private offices—and Madeline spread the newspaper on the table.

She was very formal. "We are going to have to go into this, Mr. Jarvis."

"I should think we are," said Jimmie. "You might at least have put it in good English for him."

"You think *I* gave it to him, Jimmie?"

"That has crossed my mind, Madeline. You've fed him before—to your own purpose, haven't you?"

"Of course."

Jimmie folded his arms. "Tell me, Madeline—from the shoulder—what do you think of me as a candidate?"

"From the shoulder—I think we could have done better." She looked him straight in the eyes, saying it.

It might have come from the shoulder, but Jimmie felt it in the pit of his stomach. "To what ends would you go to see me disqualified before the convention?"

"If this item in Python's column is true, I don't think I shall have to go very far, Jimmie."

"A trial balloon—is that it?"

A quiver of anger ran through her penciled brows. "Do you have two phones on one line here?"

Jimmie brought them from the cupboard and plugged them in.

"I shall try to get him on the phone, and I want you to listen." She gave the switchboard operator an unlisted phone number, and in immediate return, over the sound of dialing got part of a conversation: "So I says to him it looks like a clotheshanger, and he says to me: go to . . ." The circuit was closed. A moment later Python himself answered.

"Lem, this is Madeline Barker. Where did you get the story?"

"What's the matter, honey? Your personality boy threatening to sue? Let him."

"This is important to me, Lem."

"Don't you think it's worth something to ole Lem Python? A scoop is a scoop, baby. I crawl for 'em, remember?"

"Confidentially, Lem," she pleaded.

"Baby . . . come around some time when you're on one side or

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the other. You're getting a little too old to do the splits in public."

Jimmie heard the phone click and cradled his own. Madeline put the receiver slowly into place. It was a good act, Jimmie thought—if it was an act. "What did all that mean?" he asked.

"It means that Lem Python is foul-mouthed, double-dealing bastard," she said, with shocking directness. She moved to the window overlooking Trinity Churchyard. "Can I go back to the headquarters and say you deny the whole thing, Jimmie?"

"You cannot. You and headquarters can ignore it as I intend to do."

"You can't ignore him, Jimmie!"

"Maybe you can't . . . I can."

"You don't know a blasted thing about me, Miss Barker," he said then.

"Nothing except what you have taught me this moment, Mr. Jarvis."

Tully's call for information had gone out to all the cab companies, and to the garages where most of the privately owned taxis were serviced.

By Tuesday noon he had two responses. He had the men come in ten minutes apart. The first driver accounted picking up the General on Third Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street, Thursday night last at ten-thirty.

And that was about the sum of cabbie-number-one's contribution. The detective filled in another space in his timetable for the General, adding:

Thursday, Mar. 15, 10:30 PM—Third Ave. and 55th took cab.

Tully asked the second cabbie to sit down at his desk. A clerk had already taken his personal statistics. The detective looked sharply at him when he explained his observation point. He had been sitting in his cab, front man in the hackstand outside the Mulvany Hotel, when the General and his friends drove up in a black limousine.

"A black limousine?" Tully repeated.

"Yes, sir. A funny looking character, the chauffeur, his face looked like his backside, if you know what I mean. No expression."

Tully thought it was just one more description of that one, and on the whole, as vivid as any. He nodded his head. "Go on."

"Well, he jumps out, runs around and fair-to hoists the old man out where the other two are waitin' to help him. One under each arm. Brother, was the old man gone." The cabbie whistled.

"Gone?"

"Legs like rubber hoses."

Tully leaned forward and put his finger on the cabbie's chest. "Think man: was it an act?"

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"I'd say it was more a act than real, mister. Nobody could be that far gone and talkin'."

"What did he say?"

"Well, sir, I heard some of the damnedest cussin' ever lighted up Fifth Avenue. And I'll tell you, I felt real sorry for the little lady. She was shushin' him, and makin' all kinds of sympathetic clucks. And I'll tell you, mister, she didn't look like an old hen type. I wouldn't be surprised she was actin' too. Could've been. Looked like a actress. Old-timer maybe. Boop-oopidoop, or whatever that was, diamonds are a girl's last friend, you know?"

"I know," Tully said.

"I got out to give 'em a hand, hold the door, something like that? Sitting looking all day at the rear bumpers of hacks, cars, busses, you don't get a show like that was. Boy, that chauffeur was pushing my chest in in a minute. The other guy, helping the old man in, he took some money out of his pocket, give it to the chauffeur to give me, and says 'Thanks just the same,' to me. D'you know what that bloated buzzard did? He looked at the bill. Whatever it was, he put it in his own pocket and gave me fifty cents. I'd like to've bounced it on the sidewalk in front of him. But I didn't. He wasn't the kind you monkey around with, I'll tell you."

Tully nodded. "How long did he wait for them to come out?"

"He didn't. Got in, drove away. Clean. You can tell when somebody's got to poke around the block a half hour."

"No reason for you to've noticed his license, I suppose."

"Jersey," the cabbie said. "That's all I noticed."

"How did you figure it?"

"Well, sir," said the cabbie, "I just thought to myself, the poor, old bastard. He's just been rolled for everything he's got, except what's inside him. I figured him to 've gone to one of them joints in New Jersey. Girls, gambling, the works. When it was all over, the boss, I figured, got his stooge to drive him home, that's Moon-face. The other two, I don't know. Maybe they picked him up here and took him over there, figuring a cut. Then again, maybe she got him, working alone, and when he passed out, this other guy was her steady boy friend. Sharp, her own class he was."

"Interesting," Tully said. "You're a pretty hep boy. I'll recommend you for the force if you ever want to put your cab to pasture."

"You mean it?"

Tully thought about it further. "As a matter of fact, I do." There was something very canny in the lad's story, he was sure. It came closer to the truth as he thought he could smell truth, than any tale he'd heard so far.

Later, when he compared the testimony, he saw that it pretty well tallied with the hotel em-

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ployees' statements: the only difference being, that the cabbie didn't use abbreviations.

Tully called his friend, the psychiatrist. The subject of hypnosis was less likely to use the language proposed to him by the hypnotist than to fall back on his own. This was New York street talk, Tully thought. The General might not find it offensive, but the detective just didn't think his tongue would curl round it easy. The method might be like him, but the substance wasn't. Not quite it wasn't. The General had used his own style many times upon the pawnbroker, and this wasn't it.

The detective looked at his watch. He had enough time to brief the D.A. and do one more stretch of legwork before driving uptown to pick up Mrs. Norris.

The legwork, merely a figure of speech this time, since he knew where he was going, took him to King's Mart on Forty-third street. August Fowler had said he equipped himself there for his sudden fishing trip. It might be a lousy pun, Tully thought, but fishy was the word for an urge to go on a sporting expedition such as you had never gone on before, and to do it on the morning after a client of considerable distinction is come upon dead. Especially when you were one of the last people to have seen him, certainly the last to do business with him. Just how fishy it was, Tully hadn't realized until he asked the manager of King's Mart, who had himself waited on Fowler, how much equipment the agent had bought.

"It came to eight hundred and ten dollars," the man said.

Tully rolled his tongue around the phrase. He could almost taste it, a pleasurable bit to a detective who was tasting his first real substance. "Eight hundred and ten dollars, with tax, I presume."

"With tax."

"Weren't you impressed with a purchase like that?"

"Only enough to wait on him myself," the manager said. Tully thought he might have humor after all. But it was said in deadly earnest.

"And he took it all with him, paying cash. Or was it a check?"

"Cash, sir."

"Would you've taken his check?"

"Certainly. He's a reputable business man."

"I guess he is at that," Tully drawled. "But didn't you have any thoughts about how a man would be carrying that much cash?"

"Thoughts like that are valuable only to a policeman," the manager said.

The salesman obviously would offer no more help. Tully mulled the words to himself, checking his notebook in the car for something else in Fowler's story. He was going fishing with Wilson Dram, the writer. Tully drove up to Forty-seventh street and consulted a dear

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little wisp of an Irish friend at Brentano's. Five minutes later he knew who Dram's publisher was, and a phone call there revealed that Dram had a home in Briarwood, Connecticut.

Tully drove to East Side Homicide, the nearest police facilities. Then he played a hunch. He got in touch with the First National Bank of Briarwood, whistling softly while he waited. Even while he passed the amenities with the cashier, however, his mood changed; he realized that something was wrong with his theory. He tried it anyway.

"Wilson Dram does have an account with you people?"

"A substantial one, sir," the cashier said.

"When I put in this call," Tully explained then, "I was going to ask you if he by any chance made a substantial withdrawal, say a thousand dollars, on the morning of March seventeenth. Then I realized that was Saturday. You're closed then, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"So he couldn't have made it then?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Just for the hell of it, check yesterday and today, will you?"

Tully watched the second hand round the clock four times.

"Mr. Tully? Nothing, sir. But I've just talked with Mr. Ryan, our president, a personal friend of Mr. Dram's. He'd like to speak to you."

"Put him on," Tully said.

"I speak in absolute confidence," Ryan started.

"A policeman's confidence can't be very absolute, Mr. Ryan," the detective said. "But I don't think this information is going to hurt your client."

"I suppose you could get an order anyway," the banker said.

"Real easy," said Tully.

"Dram made a personal loan of all I could give him early Saturday morning. Got me out of bed for it about seven-thirty. He wanted a thousand. I could give him six hundred and did. I expect he approached one or two other people for the rest. He said a friend of his was in trouble."

"He's going to be, Mr. Ryan. You can be pretty sure of that. Thanks very much. Just keep my call to yourself for a while, and I'll do the same about where I got my information."

"I would deeply appreciate that," the banker said.

Tully had been going to get in touch with Dram. He decided there was not much point to it for the present. Dram would only lie —at least until he went under oath for his friend, Fowler.

So, he thought, driving uptown to the Rockland bus station, when August Fowler learned that General Jarvis was dead, he had found it absolutely imperative to alibi himself with an expenditure of a near thousand dollars, and quick.

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His own bank account, wherever he kept it, and an hour's exploration should discover that, would no doubt show a cash withdrawal of ten one hundred dollar bills sometime between ten a.m. and bank closing, Friday. The General was still in pocket near a thousand dollars when he died, Friday. Not for anything, did Augie Fowler want to be connected with the General's pocket money.

Why not?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MRS. NORRIS had a few things of her own to say when she got off the bus with the assistance of a hand from the gallant Jasper Tully. They both started to talk at once, then both were silent at once, and both then broke into laughter.

In the car, Mrs. Norris took from her purse a piece of ribbon and handed it to the detective. The name of the shop from which it came was stamped on it: *Eric's Flowers* . . . and with a number on Third Avenue, New York.

"Aren't you interested in how I came by it?" she said in a small huff when Tully merely grunted.

"Oh, I am, I am." The devil a person was interested in how he came by his information, as long as he got it. But sure it was his business. "Forgive me, dear lady."

"Well, I reported to you on the telephone, Mr. Tully, the vulgar floral piece I took to have come from *that* woman?"

"You did," said Tully. "Very observant of you."

"I knew it ne'er came from Rockland County," she continued, "whatever we lack up there, we've taste. Well then, the more I thought of it through the morning, and knowing yesterday to've been a bit crisp, I wondered if the florist wouldn't have wrapped something round it to protect the flowers from frost in transit."

"Worthy of Holmes himself," cried Tully.

"Will you stop it, man!" Mrs. Norris fanned her face. "So I called up Mr. Hanson who's by way of being a friend of mine—especially at Christmas. He's Sanitary Commissioner, you understand. He drove out himself to the refuse baskets near the cemetery gate. And sure enough, he found a whirl of papers and this ribbon inside it."

"A valuable piece of detection, Mrs. Norris, and that's not flattery. You may have put us closer to her than we've been to date. She has a parakeet, by the way."

"A gaudy wench, Mr. Tully. I'm shocked even at the General."

"Well. I happen now to know a very nice little restaurant in that neighborhood. If you'll take your dinner with me, Mrs. Norris, we'll kill two birds with a single sling. What do you say?"

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"I'll have to let Master Jamie know where I am."

"Oh, we'll do better than that. I've to report a thing or two to him myself, and they've asked us for a drink, you know, at Mrs. Joyce's."

Jimmie was enjoying a mood of liquid gold, momentary and transient. And strictly out of Helene's martini mixer. But, God help him, he thought, why had he ever sought to spoil a beautiful friendship by talk of a marriage neither of them really wanted? Helene at least was no hypocrite. He was mouthing the catechismal lines of Mrs. Norris. The little housekeeper came in wreathed in smiles, and he would have sworn she would be of disapproving mien. Tully was a good influence.

Both she and Tully took their whiskey neat, while the detective summed up for Jimmie his work of the last two days. Jimmie would not take to the notion of hypnotism at all, and Helene sided with him.

"Got a better explanation?" Tully said, somewhat irked. He had not come easily by the notion himself.

"Who hypnotized him then?" said Jimmie. "The character who brought him in to the hotel? Father was not the type to submit himself to nonsense. He liked his whiskey straight, his women submissive, and his money in cash. Excuse my frankness, Mrs. Norris."

Tully switched then to a discussion of Fowler. "If Fowler denied giving your father a thousand dollars, if I were you, I'd get that diary back from him and take a good look at it."

"Where do you think that diary is, Jasp?"

"If it was worth a thousand dollars cash to Fowler on Friday, and another thousand to hide under Saturday, I'd say it's in a safe someplace."

"Let's get a warrant."

"Well, I was thinking of that. But why not try it the easy way first—finding him and asking him for it? Could be, he'll show up in his office in the morning."

"Did you see Python's column this morning, Jasp?"

"Can't really say I've ever read him."

Jimmie took the clipping of the column from his pocket and gave it to Tully. "Might as well read it aloud," he said, and went to the window overlooking the garden.

Tully read the item and whistled softly.

"Do you think that in some way your father was responsible for that, Jimmie?" Helene asked.

Jimmie raised his fists to heaven on the odd chance that the old gentleman had made it. "He's one of two possibilities, and right now I'd nominate him, sure."

Mrs. Norris finished her drink and got to her feet. "I'd say one of three, Master James," she said with stiff formality.

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"Three?"

"Aye, yourself is one also."

Tully merely looked at his pocket watch. "It's time for us to go out to our dinner, Mrs. Norris."

Jimmie took them to the door. When they were gone, he returned, massaged his chin with his thumb. "I guess myself *is* one also," he said, "for having got myself in so vulnerable a position."

"A lot of people were vulnerable during the war, Jimmie."

"While the generals died in bed," Jimmie said, misquoting a poem of that sentiment.

His eyes met Helene's for a moment. "Sorry," he said, "that was crass of me."

"Some people say martinis are depressants," Helene said. "Shall I put on the steak?"

"Duty first. Then we can relax," Mrs. Norris said, and then suddenly realized she was relaxing more with Mr. Tully than so short an acquaintance justified. Ah, but it was like the stress of wartime, and like war, it wasn't the circumstance you welcomed, but the distraction you found from it.

Mr. Tully, who might never have relaxed at all if he did the duties connected with his office, consented at least to follow up Mrs. Norris' clue to the General's fair lady. He commenced their exchange with the florist by buying Mrs. Norris a single tea rose for her shoulder and a bit of green to cushion it. She was putting it on and Tully paying for it when she remembered Robbie and his quoting of Bobbie Burns . . . "My love is like a red, red rose."

"Oh there now," she said, "you've put me in mind of my brother-in-law."

"Is that good or bad?" said Tully, waiting his change.

"I don't know that it's bad, but it isn't good," she said. "I'll tell you about it later if you like."

The man behind the counter returned, and counted Mr. Tully his change. "I wonder," the detective said, "if you'd mind telling me about a floral piece you fixed yesterday morning early . . . You describe it, Mrs. Norris."

Mrs. Norris did, mostly with a great circular motion as though she were illustrating an angel's wings.

The man's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. He shook his head, "I don't think it came from here, madam."

Tully took the ribbon from his pocket and ran it through his fingers while he spoke. "Now nobody would fix more than one or two pieces like that in a lifetime, much less on a Monday morning."

The man lifted his head. "I'm sorry, sir, I don't remember fixing it."

Tully went on easily. "I'd guess maybe a lady bought it, an old customer who lives in the neighborhood. A good-natured woman, likes birds, an ex-show girl."

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Mrs. Norris looked up. It was quite a picture Mr. Tully was drawing. She had not reached the "show girl" part of it in her own mind, but it fit in very neatly, she realized now. It was pleasant to admire a man as she was now admiring Jasper Tully. And there again she cautioned herself. For longer than some men's lifetimes, she had admired Mr. Robinson.

The florist shook his head steadily, and this in spite of the fact that his eyes took in the ribbon in the detective's hand.

"Do you have an assistant?" Tully asked.

"Only my wife. She relieves me at mealtime. And she would not have done up anything like you describe, believe me, sir."

"I'd like to," Tully said, and tried another approach before throwing the authority of his office into the persuasion. "I'll tell you who it was for. That might refresh your memory. It was for the funeral of General Ransom Jarvis. Does that help?"

The man squeezed the color out of his fingers. "I knew General Jarvis, if that's what you mean, sir."

"That'll do for now," Tully said. "Tell us about it."

"Not much to tell. He was in the habit of coming in once a week or so, and picking out a bouquet to take with him."

"Never sent them?" Tully asked.

"No sir. And just to show his authority, he was in the habit of plucking out a stem or two. Can't offend the lady,' he'd say."

"When was he in last?"

"Friday night—a little after five. He drove up in a cab and bought two dozen roses."

"You're sure of the time?" said Tully.

"I am. My wife was due at five o'clock and I was getting hungrier by the minute."

"Did he keep the cab waiting?"

"No sir."

"How much were the flowers?"

"Eight dollars."

"What did he pay them out of —what size bill?"

"A five and three singles, but he did ask if I could change a hundred dollar bill."

"That's what I figured," Tully said.

He could afford a cab but he walked from here, the detective thought. It must put his lady within—say—a block or two.

Mrs. Norris cleared her throat. "Had he been your customer for a long time, sir?"

"Off and on, a good many years. I remember him in uniform."

"Do you now?" she said, in a tone that took the pleasure out of the florist's reminiscence.

Tully edged around the matter for a moment to let the man's hackle settle, and then asked: "Does the lady ever buy flowers herself from you?"

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"I tell you, sir," the man said with exaggerated patience. "I don't even know the lady."

"Didn't he ever make conversation with you? Did he never refer to the woman at all?" said Tully.

"He had a saying," the florist said. "I'm trying to think of it. Something like: 'Blossoms for my Blossom.' That's not right, but something like that. Maybe her name was Rose!" Then he shook his head, turning down his own conjecture. "I'm sorry, officer."

"Don't mention it." Then Tully snapped: "That big funeral wreath —how much did the gangster pay you for it?"

The shopkeeper went a little pale, and his hand trembled when he picked up the ribbon Tully threw on the counter, but he stuck to his story. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Tully saluted him, the tip of his hat with the tip of his fingers, and let the matter stand. Outdoors he said to Mrs. Norris: "I could have asked him to let me see his books. But it probably wouldn't show anything we don't know now. The wreath was bought there, all right, and by the big bag of cheese in the chauffeur's uniform. I don't really think the flower man knows anything except enough to be scared. And he is scared. That tells quite a lot, you see."

"Poor man," said Mrs. Norris.

"I told you we should've had our dinner first," said Tully.

"What will you do now?" Mrs. Norris said as they walked a few paces down Third Avenue and turned a corner, going in a door that said *Family Entrance*. She forgot her own question for a moment: "I haven't been in a family entrance for years!"

It was a fine old tavern-restaurant, with the smell of gravy and beer combined, white cloths on the table, pyramided napkins, thick plates and the best roast beef in New York, according to Mr. Tully. He excused himself for a moment, taking pen and notebook from pocket to make a few notations.

"Why, what will I do now? Cherchez la femme, as they say in France. We know quite a bit about her now. We know for example she'll be disposing of some poor faded roses soon, the last of a lovely crop. You might even call her 'The last rose of summer left blooming alone'." He sounded very mournful. "Except I don't think she's blooming alone. We also know she has the services of a chauffeured car, and one that might be intimately connected with the murder of a Brooklyn gangster."

The mention of Brooklyn again turned Mrs. Norris' thoughts to her own family. She confided to the detective her sudden concern for her sister.

"What does he do for a living, your brother-in-law?"

"He's a printer. And he's always

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been a fine provider, Mr. Tully. And there's times I really think it's my own imagination. I'd put it all down to that right now if I'd only been able to talk to Mag herself. But first she was out for a walk at eight in the morning, then she was sick of the stomach, then she was . . . well."

Tully nodded sympathetically. "The thing you should do is go out there without advance notice."

"I'm doing just that in the morning."

"Fine. I'll drive you over myself, for I've an errand there."

It was nine o'clock in the morning when the detective put her down at the corner a few doors from her sister's. There was no use rousing Mr. Robinson's curiosity about Mr. Tully by having him drive her up to the door. She climbed the front steps, noticing a half dozen cigaret stubs stamped out there, something Mag would not tolerate if she were herself. Mrs. Norris' heart beat the drum of alarm. She thrust herself forward with determination and tweaked the doorbell.

Mr. Robinson came through the hall from the kitchen in his shirt sleeves. He needed to open his mouth twice before he could say anything. Then he honeyed her with sweet talk.

"I want to see my sister, Mr. Robinson. That's all I ask."

"Dear Annie, ask anything you like." He drew her in the door and steered her down the hall with him, very neatly keeping her from entering the living room.

"Will you have a cup of tea with me first, and we'll go up together and wake her?" Mr. Robinson took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hands vigorously—a very nervous habit, Mrs. Norris thought.

"I'll wait if she's sleeping," she said, and in the kitchen sat down to the tea he had been brewing as she came to the door. If all was not well, it would give her the sense of the house to see more of it, she thought, for somehow it was changed from when last she had been there.

"You look a bit peaked yourself, Annie. Have you not been sleeping?"

"With my eyes open, Mr. Robinson," she said.

"Excuse me a minute, Annie," he said, and slipped out the door into the front hall again.

She was of half a mind to follow him, but there was no sense in getting panicked. She drank the strong tea, and listened to the clock tick. The other morning Mag was out for a walk at eight, now she was still abed at nine. And the brief glimpse Mrs. Norris had got of the living room revealed the look of an all-night party, or at least occupancy by too many people. Aye, that was the whiff she got, stale smoke, cigars. She could

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remember it in the old days when the politicians would gather round Mr. James.

The urge to know the truth became irresistible. She went out into the hall and up the stairs. He was in the living room, on the phone with someone. She could hear the rumble of his voice, but no words. He had shut the door. She could see the open bedroom door from the top step, the double bed gaping where someone had risen from sleep there.

"Mag?" she said softly.

No answer at all.

She went to the guest room then, for if Mag were ill, it was best to sleep alone. But the bed was as neat there as a walking stick. She hurried along then to Mag's sewing room at the other end of the upstairs. A studio couch, she remembered there, and the morning sun. She opened the door after ever so light a tap. Mag's sewing dummy stood fully dressed in a summer frock. It gave Mrs. Norris such a turn she let out a little moan and retreated into the hall. She had her hand on the railing to go downstairs, when Mr. Robinson spoke from the master bedroom.

"Are you sure you conducted a thorough search, Annie?"

"I'm warning you. I'll go to the police when I go out of this house if I don't see Mag."

"Where, where is the trusting friendship, Annie, that made us paragons among warring in-laws? Did I tell you Mag was up here? I did not. You leaped to your own conclusion. Come downstairs now. I'll put on my coat and we'll go up together. She spent the night with our nextdoor neighbor. The doctor has given her pills, you see, and I'd to entertain some customers here . . . Well, if she's awake she'll tell you, and if she's sleeping, you'll sit by her side and be her first waking vision."

Mrs. Norris went down the stairs with sodden humility. Either she was a great fool, or he took her for one—and she must be, not to know which was the case herself.

She was introduced to Mrs. Anders, who then put her hand on Mr. Robinson's arm. "She slept the night through like a baby."

Little she knew of babies, Mrs. Norris thought, if she was of the opinion they slept the night through. But there was Mag sitting up, a bed jacket about her shoulders, and a tray in her lap, and her eyes lighting up for a minute when she saw her sister.

"Look who I brought with my morning kiss, love," said Mr. Robinson, leaning over his wife, and whispering whatever else he had to say into her ear.

The light was gone from her eyes when he moved from between the women.

"Sit down, Annie," Mag said, more whining than ever. "I'm a bit weak from nerves, that's all."

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"I was worried," Mrs. Norris said.

"Oh, and wasn't she, love? She was of the opinion I'd done away with you."

"He's very good to me, Annie," Mag said.

Mrs. Anders, a big woman, bounced into the room with a cup and saucer. "You'll have some tea from your sister's pot, Mrs. Norris."

Her own nerves were already jangling from the cup she had had at Mr. Robinson's, and she declined. The gesture, she thought, was made to show her that Mag's tea was tea and nothing else. They were trying to be wonderful tranquilizers, the lot of them. But when Mag gave her the tray, and remarked that she thought it was time she got up and dressed, Mrs. Norris had very little choice but to accept things as she saw them instead of as she had imagined them.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mrs. Anders," Robinson said, and then to Mrs. Norris, "You'll help her over if she needs it, I'm sure, and have a fine day together the two of you. I'll be at the shop if you want anything, Annie. Here's my card with the phone number."

Syrup ran no smoother than he did, but for the life of her she could not bring herself to apologize for mistrusting him. She looked at his card when he was gone:

Printing—old style and new
Quicker than you can say
Jack Robinson
493 Front St., Brooklyn, U.S.A.
MAin 3-6718

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

One of the puzzling things about the General's associates and activities the night before he died was the absence of fingerprints, complete and absolute, from the right door handle of his car. Someone had wiped them off. Which would seem to mean, Jasper Tully reasoned, that someone was in the car with him that day who anticipated trouble, and someone maybe whose fingerprints had a notable history.

He thought about this after leaving Mrs. Norris at her brother-in-law's. He was not entirely convinced that the General might not have had an old-time association with The Rock which, just for the hell of it, he might have been reviving. There was something about the Twenties. Well, he was over sixty himself, Jasper Tully, and to dig out the few best years of his life, he would find them there. And you couldn't doubt that retired in the bloom of health, a man like the General would be bored. Having survived many dangers, he was likely to take risks that would shiver more timid men into their beds. No, he decided, it was not at all impossible for the General to have been in some sort of game with The Rock, a game in which

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he needed money quickly. Perhaps, when he found out Jimmie was headed for Albany, he decided to pull out, and had to buy his way . . . therefore the business deal with Fowler. Then something went awry. For The Rock, fatally awry. Was he, by any chance, hoisted on his own petard? Did he maybe get something intended for the General in that last ride from the bank? He had left the motor running in a low-slung sports car, something the General also drove.

All these things the detective turned over and round in his mind, and wondered then in summary, how close to the truth he had come.

He went then to see the officials at the bank where Johnny The Rock did his last business.

When August Fowler's blond receptionist unlocked the office door in the morning, she admitted Jimmie Jarvis as well as herself. It was a nice way to start the day, a client like this, well dressed, clean shaven, and up so early in the morning. Considering the mess he had got the whole office into, Mr. Fowler should find a gentleman like this some relief, too. She hinted to find out who he was.

Finally Jimmie said: "Remember that tall, skinny man who was in here yesterday, with a sweet little woman?"

The girl nodded, but you could almost see the lacquer spreading to her face.

"I'm their lawyer," Jimmie said. And that saved him from further conversation. He sat in the chair nearest the door his face averted, and the moment Fowler had taken two steps into the room, Jimmie spoke his name.

The agent flushed. "Come inside, eh?" He gave instructions to the girl about his calls and his secretary when she came in.

"Now," said Jimmie, as soon as the man reached his desk. "What kind of a game were you up to with my father?"

"It wasn't a game, I assure you."

"I think it was, something very confidential—like this item in Python's column."

"Your father, and I hate to say it of the dead, was a conniving, double-crossing old gentleman. There was nothing he would not do for money."

"There were some things," Jimmie said, wishing to heaven he could think of at least one. "What did you buy from him for a thousand dollars?"

Fowler folded his arms, as though to protect the truth in his breast. "Foolish of me to have tried to cover that up, wasn't it?"

"What did you buy?"

"I suppose you won't believe this. I merely loaned him the money against the publisher's advance when it came."

"You thought the diary that valuable?"

Fowler met Jimmie's eyes. "I

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thought he needed money that desperately. Early Friday afternoon he called me and offered me fifty percent of the diary for one thousand dollars. I got him the thousand—but declined more than the customary ten percent."

"How altruistic of you," Jimmie said with sarcasm.

"Funny—I thought you'd say something like that. Now listen to me, Jarvis—it wasn't necessary for me to tell you this at all. But here it is—sometime between ten a.m. when he was in my office and shortly after noon, he needed money quick and urgently. From our conversation that morning, I'd say it had to do with that Brooklyn gangster's death—Rocco. He went out of here in a fog when I told him about it."

A circle was always round, Jimmie thought. For all the haste and urgency, his father had stopped to buy his mistress flowers. "Ten one hundred dollar bills?" he asked.

Fowler nodded. "You asked if I thought the diary that valuable. I did and do—if it's authentic. I didn't consider the thousand a risk."

Jimmie thought about the word authentic. "Do you doubt its authenticity?"

"While your father was alive," Fowler said, "I felt no need for such doubts."

"In other words," said Jimmie, "when he was alive to make good—or pay the penalty—a thousand dollars was no risk."

"Precisely."

"Let me have the diary," Jimmie said slowly.

"Do you have one thousand dollars with you?"

"No, but I have the District Attorney's office within call."

Fowler shrugged. "And of course, you are an honest man, unlike your father. You see, I planned to exploit the book by feeding bits of it to the columnists. I confided this to your father. Little did I know that he would go from this office to that of Lem Pythan and do a bit of selling himself."

"Are you sure of that, Fowler?"

The agent waved his hands over his head. "Where else did it come from? Python showed me my release—unopened. That's what the diary's about, man, the interesting part of it—the amours of your ancestral President and a certain Lady Sylvia Mucklethrop while he was Ambassador to England."

Jimmie closed his eyes for a moment, and plainly before them he saw his father at the desk. . . . "Who is Sylvia?". . . his face cherubic with mock innocence. "The monstrous villain," he whispered piously to himself.

Fowler stood at his window, his back to Jimmie.

"I suppose," Jimmie said then, "you put a dateline on your release and then accused Python of breaking it?"

"Exactly. How could I suspect

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an officer of the United States of such dishonor? Now Python threatens to sue me. Me, and I already out a thousand dollars."

"Sue you for what?"

"Publicly impugning his honor."

"Such sensitivity. Look, Fowler, it was ten a.m. last Friday that you talked over plans for the diary with father, eh?" The agent nodded. "At eleven he was back at his club, at twelve he was at the Mulvany where he stayed until a few minutes before he brought the diary to you, all approximate hours, but close. I doubt if there's time in there for him to have gone to Python, don't you?"

"Where then did Python get his handout?"

"I don't know for sure, but I'll say this, Fowler, a little promiscuity in a family goes further than all its virtues."

"A little!" Fowler cried. "You had better read the diary."

"I intend to—if I may have it now."

Fowler took a key from a ring in his pocket and opened the bottom drawer to a filing cabinet. He gave the red leatherbound book into Jimmie's hands. "If ever. . . ."

"If ever," Jimmie interrupted him. He lifted the book to his nose. "Smells like iodine, doesn't it—old ink?"

"That's what it is!" Fowler cried. "The old reprobate wrote it himself!"

"I didn't say that's what it is," Jimmie said irritably. "I said old ink smells like iodine."

Fowler opened his mouth to say he didn't say Jimmie said . . . and then decided to let it go. He went to the door with Jimmie. "Will you shake hands, at least, Mr. Jarvis?"

"I don't know why I should. I have a very considerable pride in my father."

"You ought to," Fowler said. "He was the most charming rogue I've ever met."

"When the estate is settled," Jimmie said, "I shall see that you get the thousand back."

Jimmie drove directly to party headquarters. Mike Zakriski intercepted him. "Hey, young fella, what are you going to do about that item in the Python's column?"

"You'll have my answer by tonight, Mike. In fact, the whole damn town will have it."

"That's more like my boy," Mike said, and clapped him on the back. A cloud of cigar smoke pursued Jimmie to the inner office door. When Mike was happy he blew his smoke in clouds. In temper, he blew smoke rings, enough of them to strangle a man.

But not around Jimmie Jarvis, no sir, Jimmie thought, and roused Madeline Barker from her punctuation of the convention keynote address. "Read this for me, Jimmie. See if you get enough breath in the right places."

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"Right now I'm saving my breath for the right places, Jimmie said. "And I want you to come with me."

Madeline looked up.

"How would you like to introduce me to Lemuel Python?"

"I'd be delighted," she said. "Preferably by cablegram. When?"

Jimmie looked at his watch. "When he gets up this morning."

Miss Barker took her purse from the drawer. "Before he goes to bed. He sleeps from eleven till seven, a.m. into p.m. that is."

They intercepted the columnist leaving his office, and Madeline introduced Jimmie.

"He's a Boy Scout," the columnist said, looking Jimmie over while he scratched his ribs with his thumbnail. Jimmie waited, letting his tongue play over the edge of his teeth. The columnist grinned. "Who was it said 'the righteous are bold?' "

"Nedda Bopper," Jimmie said. "You've got something that belongs to me. I want it."

"Come into the Pit," Python said, and led the way back into his office. The walls were covered with celebrities' pictures, all signed with love, admiration, and abiding faith. A solid mile of hollow teeth, Jimmie thought.

"I've come for my briefcase," he said. "My father borrowed it . . . and laid it down."

"Where?"

Jimmie took a long chance, met Python's eyes squarely, and answered what he surmised might have been the truth: "Where by the Grace of God, he wasn't found dead."

"Okay, Boy Scout," Python said. "I've been waiting for you to pick it up." Python opened the middle drawer of his desk and took out the initialed dispatch case. He threw it down on the desk in front of Jimmie. "Let's just say I found it."

"Do you always publish ads in your column like that one?" Jimmie said.

Python pushed his hat back on his head. "Did you expect me to clear that one with Madeline?"

"You know, there just might have been some wisdom in that," Jimmie said. He opened the briefcase and checked the notes within it—the General's samples of the diary. He merely glanced at one sheet. "Shall we go?"

Python again snapped the lock on his office door. The hall was crowded with people. At the other side of the elevators was the city editor's office, almost as crowded as Herald Square.

"Yes, sir," Jimmie said as the elevator braked for their floor. "That would have been a wise precaution to take in this case. You see these are my father's notes for a bit of fiction he was writing based on something that might have happened about a hundred years ago."

Python put his hands on his hips, and looked from Madeline to

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Jimmie, to Madeline, to Jimmie. "Who the hell do you think you're kidding, Boy Scout?"

"It's the truth, Lem," Madeline said.

"Oh, so now it's the truth," the columnist sneered. "He sat out the war in England," Python jerked his thumb at Jimmie, "rendezvousing with this Lady wha'sher-name, and now you try to tell me those intimate tid-bits happened a hundred years ago? Oh, sister!"

Miss Barker flung around to Jimmie. "Jimmie, I did not confirm or deny it. I left that for you to answer."

"Thank you," Jimmie said. "And here's my answer."

As the elevator door opened, he brought his fist up with the drive of a hammer, and catching Python under the chin, he lifted him into the emerging passengers, all of them staggering back into the elevator. "Like we Boy Scouts always say, Python, 'Be Prepared!'" He pushed through the crowd then and walked downstairs. Madeline Barker needed to skip to catch up with him.

"I think that should be adequate for Python, the Party, and possibly you, my dear," Jimmie said.

"It was a masterful blow," she said adoringly.

And sure enough, even Python's journal gave it the afternoon headline: JARVIS DEFENDS HONOR, THRASHES PYTHON.

Miss Barker concocted a lovely story for the reporters, and Jimmie could not be reached for comment.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MRS. NORRIS arrived back at Mrs. Joyce's from Brooklyn mid-afternoon in a state of some bewilderment. There had been times when Mag seemed her old sour self whose company was pleasure only when you knew she best enjoyed herself in that disposition. Then again, Mag had perked up and talked about the trip she and Mr. Robinson were going to take soon —perhaps to Scotland. "But there," she ended up, "he's only talking to cheer me up. He hasn't even the time to come up and see you in Nyack."

Nor the inclination, Mrs. Norris had thought. The best she had come back from Brooklyn with was Mag's promise to persuade Mr. Robinson that she should spend a week with Annie in Nyack whether he wanted to come or not.

Mrs. Norris stood outside Helene's door for a moment listening to the sound of the chisel on stone. She hated to interrupt anyone at work but especially Mrs. Joyce whose power to make a stone look mortal was awesome indeed. But at that moment Jimmie came whistling up the street. He had his own key, the propriety of which Mrs.

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Norris refused to think on for the moment.

Then he held it under her nose. "This is a day key, Mrs. Norris, not a night key."

She drew herself up to her best height. "Such a thought never crossed the threshold of my mind, Master Jamie."

"Then it was wiping its feet at the door," he said.

Between them they had the tea brewed when Helene came out of her workroom. "You two are in high spirits," she said.

"Did you see the afternoon paper?" said Jimmie. "I just happen to have one in my pocket."

Jasper Tully arrived soon thereafter with a second copy. He also carried the General's valise, surrendered to him by the property clerk. The final report was in from the Medical Examiner—General Jarvis had died of coronary thrombosis. Tully was glad to hear Jimmie had had a good day, his own having been a misery. Furthermore, the D.A. was wondering why, as long as he seemed to be running on Jimmie's ticket for Lieutenant Governor, he didn't resign from the District Attorney's staff.

"Not a bad idea, Tully for Lieutenant Governor," Jimmie said. He wiped butter from his fingers. "Well, shall we have a look at father's masterpiece? By the way, just for the hell of it, I stopped by an experts. It was his opinion this was genuine, so let it not be said that the old boy did a sloppy job of forgery."

"Forgery?" Mrs. Norris put her fist to her breast.

"Oh, without a doubt," Jimmie said. "I have no doubt he was working on it all afternoon of the day he died."

Mr. Tully lifted the book to his nose. "Is it written in iodine?"

"No, it's ink all right. He had the formula for the ink made in those days, and a sample of the shade he wanted all in my dispatch case. I suppose in time we'll turn up the chemist who prepared it for him, or the printer. Chemist, I suppose."

Mrs. Norris lifted her chin at the word printer. Something began to happen inside her, and she had to find a magazine to fan herself.

"When he was experimenting for himself," Tully said, "he must've been using iodine. I found three bottles up there."

Mrs. Norris cleared her throat. "And the gardener brought a fistful of nibs in from the flower bed under his window."

. . Helene laughed aloud. "What a marvelous scandal this might have made." She had taken the diary from Tully's hands and read a passage.

"You have a charming sense of humor," Jimmie said.

"Oh," she said, "here it is—the passage that landed poor Pythan in the hospital."

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"Read it out!" Tully said.

Mrs. Norris could not share their mirth. She was remembering the talking-to she had given the Nyack telephone office for having billed two calls to Brooklyn instead of one. She just could not listen to the things they were laughing and shaking their heads over. But the good Lord be praised, at least, he had had the wisdom not to make her censure of the old gentleman too loud. Oh, she could remember how the occasions on which Mr. Robinson had been to Nyack. He had been introduced to General Jarvis, and Mr. Robinson was not a man to consider his position in life.

"Well," Jasper Tully said finally. "there's two men dead, and while there's a thing or two explained, we're not much closer to the how, why and who of that." He accounted then his own day, starting with his last visit to Brooklyn. "One thing kind of significant to me about The Rock's banking habits, Jimmie, he made his deposits every other day, and he always got his receipts in duplicate."

"A partner?" Jimmie said.

"I don't see any other explanation," Tully said: "The Brooklyn police say it could be tax information. They got a tracer on that, but I'd go along on the partner idea."

"I suppose we're reasonably safe in assuming that it was not Father," Jimmie said.

"Maybe you are," Tully drawled. "I'm not making any assumptions from here on in. I've put out a questionnaire to every bank in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx. I want to know if anybody else in New York was in the habit of making deposits on alternate days. The Rock's business practices sound to me like a crook's check on a crook."

Jimmie grinned, catching some of Tully's slow fire. It had been a long time since they worked together, and he had all but forgotten the strain tightening with each new discovery, the agony of each frustration. Tully gave the impression of being a man of infinite patience, but if you knew him like Jimmie did, you could see the fire kindling.

"What else, Jasp?"

Tully gathered his feet under him. "If I get a wire recorder down here, would you be willing to go over it from the beginning tonight?"

"Willing, but not eager," Jimmie said, thinking it must start at Albany for him.

"Mrs. Norris?"

"Aye." She thought of the day the old man asked her for a few dollars until the first of the month. He had gone straight from her refusal to the family papers in the attic.

"Do you mind, Mrs. Joyce?"

Helene shook her head, and thought of seeing in Lem Python's column that Madeline Barker was

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lunching with James Ransom Jarvis.

"I guess for me it starts on Water Street," Tully said, "me as a stranger trying to place a bet at that one-armed restaurant called Minnie's before we staked it out." He pointed to the diary in Jimmie's hand. "What are you going to do with that?"

"Put it right back in the attic—and if it shows up a hundred years hence, let them worry about its authenticity. A little scandal then may save the Jarvis name from oblivion."

"You sound just like your father," Mrs. Norris said with vast disapproval.

Mrs. Norris told no one where she was going in the morning. Mr. James was near ruin for the public discussion of his private family affairs. If there was matter for disgrace in her own family, Mrs. Norris intended to keep it to herself as long as possible. She took the subway, a bus and a taxi, and then went by shank's mare, the last block to Mr. Robinson's printing shop.

It was a cold and windy day, and having got her courage to its highest point for the encounter, she was furious to find the place locked up as tight as a bailiff's fist. She pounded on the doors, front and back, and then seriously contemplated breaking a window. The prospect of being caught at it restrained her. She crossed from the back way to a lunchroom where she hoped for a cup of hot tea to tune up her powers of cogitation. Just as she was going into the foggy-windowed restaurant, Minnie's, she remembered that this was the place which Mr. Tully had been watching the night he saw the General go by at top speed.

Mrs. Norris sat on the last stool, near the cash register. Two other customers were huddled over steaming cups at the other end of the counter. Minnie came to her, drying his hands on his apron. Though she loathed coffee, she ordered it, thinking that asking for tea might antagonize the restaurant keeper, and that she did not want to do. He was pleasant enough to give her courage. She remembered that Mr. Tully had tried unsuccessfully to place a bet here.

"I'm a great follower of the horses," she said, when Minnie brought her coffee, "or I was in the old country. A friend of mine dow the street said you might put me next to where I could lay a few dollars on a nag."

Minnie looked at her through half-closed eyes. "Who's your friend?"

"His name's Jim. He works for the coal yard at the corner," she said with a fine glibness.

"Jim," Minnie repeated. "Have a doughnut with your coffee." He brought one and gave it to her without her saying please, no, or

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thank you. Meanwhile he was examining her from all angles. He turned on the radio then, loud enough so that the two men at the other end of the counter needed to raise their voices to talk to one another. He took a dime from the cash register and went into the phone booth behind her. A telephone stood unused beside the register.

Mrs. Norris could feel the pick-up of her heartbeat. She was glad the two working men were present at the other end of the counter.

Minnie came out, turned down the radio, and gave her a wink and a nod of his head. Whether to be glad or sad, Mrs. Norris didn't know. If he took her money no doubt the information would be valuable to Mr. Tully . . . but she couldn't even name a horse. Worse, she couldn't name the park where they were running.

The two working men got up, paid their bill at the cash register and left.

"More coffee?" Minnie asked her.

She was already nauseous with what she had had. She shook her head. "Could I look at your paper?"

"Why not?" Minnie handed her the *News*.

She tried not to make obvious haste in finding the sports page. With the rattle of pages, however, she did not hear the man come up behind her. She jumped when he spoke.

"This the lady?"

Since there was no other present, it was an unnecessary question, but Mrs. Norris spun around, and managed to get her toes on the floor. It was the round-faced chauffeur. He caught her arm and helped her rather roughly off the stool. "I ain't got much time, lady, but I want to take you on a little trip."

"No thank you," Mrs. Norris said, trying to jerk her arm free.

"It won't hurt a bit," he said.

"I haven't paid for my coffee," Mrs. Norris cried, already being borne through the door.

"It's on the house," Minnie called after them. "Tell the D.A. to come around in his *own* pants."

Foolish, foolish me, Mrs. Norris thought. Before her was a spotless black limousine. Surely not . . .

"Hold on there, man!"

Mrs. Norris was almost as happy as of old to see Mr. Robinson then.

"This is my sister-in-law," he said, "who the devil are you?"

The burly one stood staring, "Nick said. . . ."

"Get away out of here and leave this woman alone!" Mr. Robinson began waving his arms as though he were scattering chickens.

Mrs. Norris jerked her arm free of the big one's hand. He had not much of a grasp on her. For all Mr. Robinson's act they were no strangers, these two, and that was the most frightening thing of all.

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Mr. Robinson took her in charge. He began to walk her across the street. "Were you on your way to see me, Annie? You shouldn't speak to strangers in this neighborhood, you know."

She was by no means sure she should speak to as intimate an acquaintance as her brother-in-law, for that matter. But she had undertaken to pilot this mission herself, and it was now under full sail.

Mr. Robinson took her through the plant, all the machinery covered and still, and in his private office sat her down in a leather chair. "Now, my dear, tell me what happened."

Mrs. Norris decided on a direct question. "Mr. Robinson, did you help General Jarvis with that forgery he tried to sell as a diary?"

Robbie threw back his head and laughed. "Discovered so soon!" he cried. "I wonder if he wouldn't have carried it off if he had lived. He was a remarkable man, Annie . . . Yes, I helped him. And proud I was to be asked, if you want to know."

"I see," said Mrs. Norris, not prepared for so frank an admission. "Who was the man you just took me out of the clutches of?"

Mr. Robinson had no intention of being frank in that matter. "I have no notion, having but seen him around the neighborhood, Annie. I suspect he's a gangster, if you must know. That's why I came up on the run. He may have mistook you for someone else. Or were you up to something suspicious?"

Oh, the wily one, she thought. If she admitted now trying to place the bet, he would be off the hook and away. Bad as she was at it, she must try a little acting of her own. She picked up a magazine and fanned herself. "A gangster did you say, Mr. Robinson? Do you think he was planning to give me a ride in that, that hearse?"

She fanned herself more violently. "Do you have a drop of whiskey, Mr. Robinson? My heart's near to bursting."

Mr. Robinson swung open a cabinet door in the midst of his books, and took a bottle out and with it a glass. Mrs. Norris got another start. The paneling was covered with pictures of foreign cars . . . The Duke of Glower, she thought, Rocco The Rock and the Duke of Glower. Her brother-in-law poured her a drink, his face set in a hard little smile of toleration. Whether or not she was fooling him, she didn't know. Likely not. But it served his purpose to play the game with her.

"Mr. Robinson, I'll need a drop of water to run that down in. When it's my heart, I cannot take it neat."

Robbie bowed and went out of the office with a glass.

She hopped to the opened panel, for opposite the liquor cabinet was

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its match, another cabinet, and she prayed it might open on the same key. It did. There was a boxful of money within it, and a neat little bundle of bank deposit slips. One of them she managed to loose and pocket. She locked the cabinet and put the key where she had found it. On the wall of the panel was taped a card with a phone number: EX 4-1587. She had just managed to fling herself back in the chair when Mr. Robinson returned. If he knew what she had done, he did not let on.

"I'm taking Mag to Florida, by the way, Annie. I've sold the business here, which is why everything is shut up."

"Florida?" she repeated. Remembering then her need for it, she sipped the water and downed the whiskey.

"It's a fine place for Mag. The Brooklyn climate is bad for her health, the doctors say."

"She was hoping it was Scotland you'd take her to, Mr. Robinson. That's what I came to talk to you about."

"Is it—and not the old gentleman's forgeries?"

"Oh, them," she said. "They'll soon be forgot."

"As will we all when we are gone, Annie. Scotland would kill her . . . as Florida may me. Now I have work to do. Can I put you in a taxi for somewhere? They're hard to find in this neighborhood, taxis."

"I wish you would," she said. "I'd prefer not to meet the gentleman with the limousine again."

Half-fact, half-fantasy, Mrs. Norris thought, once more walking out into God's sunlight. At the end of the block, Mr. Robinson hailed a cab. It was occupied, but the driver called out to wait. He would be right back.

"I don't suppose you have time to stop and see Mag?" Mr. Robinson said, at the cab door.

"I'm in a bit of a hurry."

Robinson grinned. "I'll bet you are. Good-bye, Annie."

Mrs. Norris did not know what sort of impression she had left with her brother-in-law. All that money . . . and the deposit slips. She took it out of her purse and looked at it. The First Federal Bank. That was the bank in front of which the gangster Rocco had been picked up for his last ride. There was no doubt at all that it was Robbie who was getting the duplicate deposit slips. Poor Mag. Poor herself, having to confess this in the family. She leaned forward and asked the cabbie to stop at the first public phone and wait while she made a call.

She dialed EX 4-1587. Presently a man answered.

"Who is this?" Mrs. Norris tried to be authoritative.

"You got a wrong number, lady. This is a unlisted phone." Whoever it was hung up. Not a cultured voice certainly.

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Mrs. Norris put in a call to the Manhattan District Attorney's office and asked for Jasper Tully. He was expected in soon. Not soon enough for Mrs. Norris. "I want to leave him a message then. It's very important. This is Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Annie Norris."

"What number are you calling from, Mrs. Norris?"

She gave the number. "But I won't be here! It's a public phone. Now I want you to tell Mr. Tully —I have one of the other bank deposit slips, one of the duplicates. Do you have that?"

"Yes, ma'am." It was the District Attorney's secretary, and she sounded competent as she repeated the message.

"And I want you to give him this number to trace—it's unlisted and it may be important."

The woman took the number and repeated it. "Anything else, Mrs. Norris?"

"I should think that's enough," Mrs. Norris said, and hung up.

She had something else on her own mind, however, something the goonish chauffeur had said that she did not want to forget. It had an odd but persistent association in her mind with something she had seen or heard recently.

She returned to the cab and promised the driver an extra dollar for speed.

The cabbie squinted at her in the mirror as they pulled away from the curb, "If you mean I got to stay ahead of that black limousine, lady, I ain't making rash promises."

Mrs. Norris twisted around and peered out the rear window. Loyal as a shadow, the great black car kept pace with them. She leaned forward and raised her voice. "We'll have worse than a rash you and me, young man, I promise, if you don't keep ahead of it."

But the limousine narrowed the distance between the cars as soon as the cabbie stretched it.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

JASPER TULLY was giving himself an hour off the top of every day now to try and find the General's fair lady. He had that very morning located his third parakeet within the Eldorado exchange and within two blocks of the florist shop, and he had listened to the laments of many a sad and lonely woman any one of whom would have been glad to open her door to the General, he thought. But he was reasonably sure that none he had talked to so far had.

Calling in to his office, he picked up Mrs. Norris's message. Acting on her own—and this was the reason she had been in the D.A.'s office as long as Tully himself—the secretary had ordered tracers on EX 4-1587 as well as the phone from which Mrs. Norris had called.

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"Mr. Tully, the unlisted phone number belonged to John Rocco."

"Where the devil did she get it?" Tully cried. And then answered himself. "Never mind. Where did she call from?"

The woman gave him the exact location, and Mrs. Norris' word that she would not be there. Tully swore under his breath. Not only had she taken upon herself to do police work, by the looks of things, but she was expecting him to sit and wait for her to get in touch with him again.

He called Jimmie at his office. Jimmie's first reaction was alarm. But Mrs. Norris was a sensible woman, he assured Tully.

"All right then," Tully said, "she can sit in my office or wherever she lands and sensibly wait for us. Just in case something went wrong, I'm going over."

"Pick me up on your way," Jimmie said.

The public phone from which Mrs. Norris called was in a cigar store just three blocks from Minnie's Restaurant on Water Street. The man behind the counter swore no woman had been in his place that morning, either to phone or buy tobacco. Obviously, one had. The D.A.'s secretary did not make up the phone number nor the address. Tully and Jimmie went on to the restaurant. Minnie gave them a cold stare, and the surly retort: "I don't serve no women in this place."

Tully called his office. No word yet.

Jimmie called Helene, also from Minne's phone booth. The line was busy. He sat, the door of the booth open, waiting and thinking. She had relatives, a sister in Brooklyn, and she was worried about her.

"Jasp, didn't you bring her over to Brooklyn yesterday? Do you remember the name of her sister?"

Tully was staring out the window, through the streaks of steam. He was reminded of rainy days in his childhood, his nose against the parlor window. "Robinson," he said, and even as he said it, he saw the name painted in white letters on the brick wall across the way. He turned his head quick enough to suspect Minnie of having listened with very large ears. Minnie smiled at him. That was enough to make a more gullible man than Tully suspicious.

"Come on, Jimmie."

They strode across the street. With no response at the back door, they tried the front, also without results. Tully had a feeling about the place, the minute they had circled it and he peered in the front of the building. The two benches, the great ashstands, the string of faded lettering samples in the window told of a very poor business—in printing.

"How do we get in?" said Jimmie, having much the same feeling.

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Tully gave the matter but an instant's thought. "I smell smoke," he said, and Jimmie could not be sure whether it was a ruse or reality. Tully put the butt of his revolver through the glass of the door window. As soon as he could do it without destroying himself he hoisted his body up and in. He picked up the nearest phone, got the precinct police, identified himself, and told them he had broken in at this address, thinking there was a fire in the building. A mistake. Sorry.

He and Jimmie stayed just long enough to confirm their first suspicions. Minnie was a duck all right, a sitting duck, a decoy. This was the real thing, a bookie's paradise. Or had been. The shop was closed. All the phones save one were dead. Disconnected. Tully consulted the phone book. Having delivered Mrs. Norris to the corner, he was able to find Robinson's home address quickly.

He called the Brooklyn D.A.'s office to get out the warrant for Robinson and to get a squad out here to go over the print shop. He opened up the siren on the way to the Robinson residence. It had been two hours and ten minutes since Mrs. Norris had called in, and she had not been heard from since.

Mrs. Norris was far too busy with her own pursuits to think of calling anyone. Her cab had parted company with the limousine at the entrance to the tunnel.

She went up the steps to Mrs. Joyce's thinking not for an instant of the four dollar and fifty cent fare she had paid. Helene opened the door almost as soon as she rang. A sweet woman.

"Mrs. Joyce, do you remember the General's valise Mr. Tully brought last night?"

It sat where Tully had put it down in the livingroom, undisturbed by the cleaning woman. Someone had taken the trouble to lock it, however, and the devil knew what he had done with the key. With a cuticle scissors and an eyebrow tweezers, they managed to open it.

"It may be my imagination," Mrs. Norris said, spreading one of the newspapers on the floor. She was on her knees like a child with the comics. Helene spread the other paper. "I remember it flitting in and out the corner of my eye. . . . Nick, Nick, Nick . . . the name Nick. The big, moon-faced one, when he tried to get me into his limousine this morning . . . Nick, he said. I heard it. . . ."

Helene but glanced at her, an instant's admiration. She was traveling like a tumbleweed in the wind Mrs. Norris blew up. "Here it is, here it is!" she cried, and read aloud the account of Nick Casey's arrest as a Peeping Tom . . .

"Read on, read on, girl!"

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" '. . . Casey was released on the sworn testimony of Miss Flora Tims that. . . .'

"That's the one!" Mrs. Norris cried. "Flora 'Blossoms for my blossom.' That idiot of a florist! Flowers for my Flora, of course! Do they give her address?"

" 'Miss Flora Tims of 763 East Fifty-ninth,' " Helene read.

"Would you be willing to confront her with me, Mrs. Joyce?"

"I'd be delighted to meet her," Helene said. "Though she may not be nearly so eager to meet us, Mrs. Norris."

Mrs. Norris grunted, getting up from her knees. "We'll be very hospitable," she said. She folded the paper and tore the Casey item from it. "Let's go."

"You can pound all day on that door, mister. They all left about a hour ago. Florida, I hear. Driving in a lovely black car, this long . . ." The woman stretched her hands as though she were playing a squeeze-box.

"All," said Tully. "How many?"

"Well, there was the chauffeur. . . .

"Besides the chauffeur?" Jimmie interrupted.

"Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. They're Scotch you know . . ."

"Anybody else?"

"A big man, handsome. Lots of authority. I bet he's a magnet."

"I'll bet," said Jimmie. "Did you notice the license?"

The woman slowly put her own construction to that question. "Should I of?"

"Only if you thought it was unusual." Tully took over easily.

"Oh, it was unusual enough, but Mr. Robinson, he's got a regular menagerie of friends, coming in and going out at all hours the last few days."

Jimmie and the detective exchanged glances. Obviously, Mr. Robinson had been making book from home in the last few days, or as much of the old trade as he could manage from a residential address. Everything had been in a state of flux since the night The Rock was murdered.

"I'll come back and see you some day, ma'am," Tully said and tipped his hat.

Jimmie followed him back to the car. At the first police call box the detective stopped. He asked that a two state alarm be put out to intercept the limousine heading for Florida.

" 'Two and a half room apartments,' " Mrs. Norris read as she and Helene crossed the street. "I've often wondered what a half-room was, and what they did with the other half they didn't rent you in these places." She found herself chattering and paying precious little attention to what she was saying. She would not have said she was nervous, but she found herself very, very grateful that

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Helene Joyce was with her. She caught Mrs. Joyce's hand as she found the name TIMS on the box. The hand was cold and damp, but firm, telling her she was not alone in fear or fierceness.

Helene rang a bell other than Miss Tims'. The buzzer sounded to let them in. "This way if she's in we'll be face to face with her at least when she slams the door on our foot."

Outside Miss Tims' door the two women stood and looked at each other. Then Mrs. Norris gave the bell a push. Within the apartment the parakeet started a racket. It carried on for a moment, then stopped like a machine turned off. Mrs. Norris thought of a remark but her mouth was suddenly dry.

The little eye-view door opened. "Why don't you ring downstairs and give a girl warnin'?"

Mrs. Norris lifted her chin. "Miss Tims, I am the late General Jarvis's housekeeper." That, she calculated, would either get them in or get them out in a hurry.

Miss Tims unlatched her door without a word, opened it, and stood before them in her slip. "Wouldn't you like to come in, Mrs. Norris? I'm awful glad to make your acquaintance."

"This is Mrs. Joyce."

Miss Tims began to sniffle, and nothing could have made Mrs. Norris feel less at ease. She had been prepared to beat this woman over the head if necessary, but certainly not to console her. Maybe with her clothes on she looked like a flapper, but this way she looked like something out of an old English movie.

Meanwhile the parakeet was squawking a noise that sounded very much like "Take it off, take it off," wherever he was.

Miss Tims lifted a sheet from over the cage.

"Ransom? Ransom?" said the bird.

Mrs. Norris was distinctly embarrassed. "He talks very nicely," she said.

Miss Tims then burst into sobs. "Oh, Mrs. Norris, it was just a terrible mistake, him being jealous of Nick. It mightn't ever've happened if it wasn't for that."

Helene took a well-cologned handkerchief from her purse and gave it to Flora.

Flora dabbed her eyes with it and then breathed the smell of it into her lungs. "Gee, honey, this smells real sweet. What is it?"

"Peasblossom," Helene said. "You may keep it."

"Thanks just awfully. Ransom used to bring me essences from all over the world . . . poor dear. I miss him so."

"About him and Nick," Mrs. Norris prompted. It gave her a most uncanny feeling to speak familiarly of a gangster. She had better get used to it, having one in the family. God's righteousness smiting her for her pride.

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"It was all a mistake, don't you see?"

"Not quite," she said.

Flora bit her lip. "I'll show it to you, but don't you tell anybody I got it, 'specially Nick."

" 'Specially Nick," Mrs. Norris promised willingly.

The girl went into the bedroom, the stupid bird calling after her "Night-night, night-night." In a moment she returned and handed to Mrs. Norris the note which had first sent the General into a rage when he received it in Robbie's office. Helene read it over her shoulder.

> I want a piece of your little plum. Make arrangements while you are there tonight or I will make them for you. You are an old man. There is enough for both of us.
>
> Nick Casey

"He thought I was the little plum, don't you see?"

Mrs. Norris nodded. At least she could see that Nick Casey was the link in the chain that had brought the General low. "And it wasn't you?"

"I hadn't seen Nick for years till then. And Nick was talkin' about a business deal he wanted in on—out in some silly place in Brooklyn." Flora laid a finger as limp as her backbone on Mrs. Norris' arm. "Furthermore, I don't know what Ransom was doin' out there at all. The note wasn't meant for him in the first place. It was meant for somebody else entirely."

"Mr. Rocco?" said Mrs. Norris.

"Sh-sh," Flora said. "He's dead."

"So is the General," Mrs. Norris snapped.

"But he died different," Flora wailed.

"That is an understatement of some proportions," Helene remarked. She had the note from Mrs. Norris' hand, and was about to put it in her purse. Flora's eyes were not too wet to see it. She rubbed her fingers together, the gesture of "hand-it-over." It had been worth a try, at least, Helene thought.

"A girl's got to have some protection," Flora said, naive as a fox. "You ought to know all about that, honey. This is my insurance policy." On her way to the bedroom again, she paused. "I don't suppose Ransom left me anything? I've been dyin' to find out only Nick wouldn't let me. And I don't care about money. I just want to know if he mentioned me."

Suddenly there was a long ring and a short at the doorbell. The parakeet began to screech "Ransom, Ransom," and Flora leapt for the bird's coverlet. "That's Nick downstairs now, I promised him to go to Florida with him and I don't want to go, I don't want to go away from here ever . . . Ransom and I was so happy."

"Miss Tims, I should prefer not

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to meet Mr. Casey here," Mrs. Norris said. Helene was already looking out the window.

"Not out there in daylight, honey," Flora cried. "Nick'd look there first if he was lookin'. I got to hide this note. Why don't you two just roll under the beds? There's two of them, one for each of you . . ."

Since the choice of escapeways was even narrower, the two women looked at each other and then abandoned their dignity.

The detective and Jimmie were caught between wrath and despair arriving at Mrs. Joyce's house and finding her gone as well. This was the logical place for Mrs. Norris to have come—unless she had found out far more than her phone call intimated. Tully went to the kitchen, Jimmie into the livingroom to see if there was a note anywhere. There Jimmie found the General's valise gaping, one of the pages of the newspaper on the floor, spread open. He called out to Tully, and before the detective reached him he found the other paper, one item having been torn from it.

It took Jasper Tully nine minutes on the phone with the newspaper's librarian.

"Nick Casey! That's it all right. . . ." He listened to the rest of the story, shaking his head at his own blindness. Even while he listened, his eyes wandered through the story of the St. Patrick's Day preparations. . . . the perfect decoy. Just like Minnie's restaurant.

He wrote the name and address of Miss Flora Tims, thanked the librarian and hung up. "Blossoms for my little blossom," he muttered in disgust. "Do you know what's wrong with the world, Jimmie?" He waved his arms in the air. "Too many distractions! Nobody pays attention! Nobody listens. Everybody talks. That's what hell is going to be like when we get there."

"Maybe that's where we are now," Jimmie said. "Are we on our way?"

"With the throttle open."

Mrs. Norris at least had had the presence of mind to go under feet first, as it were, so that her head was beneath the foot of the bed, and she could plainly hear all that went on in the livingroom. Mr. Casey was in an ugly mood. Mrs. Norris could see his feet and Flora's, toes to toes, suddenly Flora's were lifted from the floor entirely, and it was not because she was caught in a loving embrace.

"Make up your mind, baby. You're going with me in five minutes whether it's with a suitcase or in it." The man's pointed toes were suddenly flapping across the bedroom. In its cage, cover or no, the parakeet was screaming with glee. Casey flung Miss Tims on the bed, fortunately the one under

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which was Helene. There wasn't room for an ounce of play between Mrs. Norris and the springs. Casey opened the closet door, helping himself to clothes and suitcase, which he tossed onto Mrs. Norris' bed. "Now you get them packed pronto. I'm going to take care of that bird."

That would be a mercy, Mrs. Norris thought.

Flora began to scream and thump the bed. "I won't go and you leave my bird alone! Ransom bought him for me at Christmas."

"I'll buy ya a peacock for the Fourth of July!" Casey shouted.

"I just want you to go away and leave me alone," Flora wailed.

"Un-unh. You know too much about Nick, baby. And Nick don't like to see you gettin' lonesome."

He stomped out then, and there was a terrible flurry and threshing about in the living room. Flora lifted the skirt of the bedspread, throwing some light on Mrs. Norris. "Can't you help me save my poor little bird? I'm goin' to tell him you're here if you don't."

Nick roared from the bedroom door: "The goddam bird flew out the window! He'll be blabbin' up and down the neighborhood, "Ransom, Ransom, Ransom."

"He'll get pneumonia out in this weather!" Flora screamed and ran to the window.

"I'm losing patience, baby."

"Nickie—I don't know a thing about you, exceptin' that note Ransom got from you by mistake . . ."

"Keep talkin'."

"If I was to give that to you now, would you go along to Florida, and jus' forget ever meetin' up with me again?"

"I'd love to forget it, baby."

"Swear it?"

"My word as a gentleman," Casey said.

The sound of Flora's heels clacked across the floor.

"Thanks," Casey said after a moment, and Mrs. Norris could hear the tearing of paper.

There was a long ring and a short at the door. "That's Echo," Casey said. "I'm gonna wait in the car, baby. He'll help you pack. Come here now! You ain't going out any window when my back is turned." Casey must have been hauling her by the arm for her feet stumbled after his to the door.

"But you promised," Flora cried, "you gave me your word!"

"As a gentleman," said Nick. "You know better than that."

"Mrs. Norris?" Helene squeaked.

Mrs. Norris lifted the spread to peer out at her.

"What will we do?" Mrs. Joyce queried in a whisper.

"I wish we could fly out like the bird," she said.

Casey and Flora returned, and with them a man the toes of whose very shoes rose from the floor like black moons, Mrs. Norris thought.

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"Now listen to me, baby, and listen good. We got a nice large trunk on the back of the car. You can go in that—or you can go inside the car sitting beside me."

Flora's response was to sink into a dead faint, her face six inches away from Mrs. Norris'.

"Bring her any way you can," Casey snarled. "And don't wait to clean up."

"Echo" merely grunted.

Mrs. Norris tensed her fists. She waited, holding her breath until she heard the door close behind Casey. The thing called "Echo" came between the two beds to begin his work on Flora. As though by signal, Mrs. Norris and Helen each grabbed him by a leg, except that Mrs. Norris couldn't hold hers when he began to tumble. She humped out from beneath the bed like a snail, however, and while the thug was twisting and scratching at Helene's grip on his ankle, Mrs. Norris climbed onto the bed and bounded from there upon his back. Helene scrambled out and to her feet.

"Throw water on her, we may need her," Mrs. Norris directed Helene, riding the goon piggyback while he balked round the room like a mule.

Helene grabbed the only water nearby, a vase with the last of the late General's roses, and dumped it flowers and all on Miss Flora Tims. She rose up in a wrath and Mrs. Norris let go of her hold on "Echo." He went out of the place like a rabbit only a leap and a pant ahead of the vixens.

The detective and Jimmie had driven up at the moment "Echo" got out of the limousine to go upstairs. They waited long enough to ascertain that two people were in the car, a man and a woman, and both of them looking like mummies. Then, even as Tully and Jimmie were walking by, the man took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hands. He pulled himself up in the seat then, using a chrome rail at the side, and from that he wiped the perspiration also. He turned and stared at the building into which the thug had gone.

Tully watched with fascination-tion. Thus was accounted the lack of fingerprints on the door of the General's Jaguar! A mere nervous habit of Mr. Robinson's.

He and Jimmie went into Flora's building, striding quickly, and ringing every bell for entrance into the downstairs hall. They were admitted in time to catch the elevator. The door was closing on the wire cage when Tully recognized Nick Casey. Wherever the gangster had found the stairs he was on his way out of the building. Tully moved with the unexpected speed of a snake, and slithered his lean body out before he was caged in the lift.

Casey caught sight of him then,

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sprinted across the street and leaped into the driver's seat of the limousine. The car had been parked with the caution of thieves, and it took Casey but an instant to power it on its way. Tully had his revolver in hand. He might have shot out the tires, and again he might have missed. There were bystanders and walkers on the street. Let him go. The alarm was out. He would not go far, even if the license number Tully wrote down was another phony.

The detective moved in the direction from which Casey had come and found the stairs. From some flights up, as he started mounting, someone was starting down pell mell. Then came a shrieking and howling and clamor of heels, all to put him in mind of goats and geese, bats and banshees. He drew his revolver and waited. The moonfaced one came down, his mouth and his eyes like round holes.

Moon-face flung himself against the wall and crumbled there into a heap as the three women hove down upon him. Mrs. Norris was brandishing an ashstand like a shillelah, Mrs. Joyce had a lamp by the neck, and the other one, looking like she'd been washed up in the seaweed, and in her petticoat at that, was waving a fireplace broom.

"All right, ladies. You can turn in your badges," Tully said at the top of his voice. He frisked the blubbering lump at his feet and took from him a snub-nosed revolver and a knife that would have butchered a hog.

Jimmie came down the steps. "Anything I can do?"

"Round up the women," said Tully. "They shouldn't get too fond of this sort of business."

He jerked the goon onto his feet and out to the car. He wanted him to see that Casey had abandoned him. The poor slob stood limp and miserable in bewilderment that the limousine was gone from where he had parked it. The poor slob, Tully thought again, poor bedamned. He was equipped like an arsenal. All Casey ever needed to do was say "sick 'em," and get himself an alibi.

Later, when all the pieces were being fitted together in the D.A.'s office, Tully finished the portrait of "Echo": "A mechanical man, with a kind of a heart, but no brains at all. When it comes to an automobile, there probably isn't a better driver on the road. Nothing else on his mind, don't you see. Absolute concentration. And when he was told to give the note to Johnny Rocco, Casey must have told him no more than was absolutely necessary—a man in his seventies, who drove a sports car, and who could be found at Robbie-the-Printer's."

Mrs. Norris gave a start. "Robbie-the-Printer," she said. "Oh, my goodness."

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"He's quite a fellow, your brother-in-law," Mr. Tully said with a wink at Jimmie. "He thinks you might be willing to go bail for him. Says the General told him you had buckets of money."

"Buckets—oh!" Mrs. Norris cried, "well if he's the good provider Mag still claims he is, he can go bail for himself."

Nick Casey and his passengers had been picked up at the mouth of the Lincoln Tunnel. Mr. Robinson admitted to bookmaking in partnership with Johnny Rocco, but to no other crime. All he had accepted from Mr. Casey was his offer of a ride to Florida after Rocco was killed. As soon as he could then Mr. Robinson had liquidated his assets. And how he had come to know Nick Casey? It took Robbie-the-Printer but a moment to get round that: "He was a friend of a friend . . . of a friend, who was trying to tempt me into another little business on the side . . . the manufacture of famous diaries, you might say."

Mr. Tully had not pursued the question further.

"Whatever's to become of Mag now?" said Mrs. Norris.

"Well, I'll tell you how I see it," Tully said. "Mr. Robinson was inquiring if there was any chance of him being deported to the country of his origin. He would work there at the same trade, legitimate, he says, and he's promised Mag all her life to take her home."

"The canny rogue! A fit companion for the General, excuse me, Master Jamie."

"I was thinking much the same thing," said Jimmie. "You know, Jasp, I have a few friends in the State Department . . ."

"If you want my advice then, my boy," said Tully, "put in a good word quick for a bad egg. I'll press his suit here, if you know what I mean."

The D.A. himself squeezed the confession out of "Echo" and his boss. While Nick was trying to explain to Miss Tims the mistake his boy made that Thursday night, "Echo" returned to Brooklyn to straighten things out there. He arrived back at Robbie-the-Printer's in time to get Johnny Rocco's "No" to Nick's proposition. He trailed him then to the First Federal Bank. He let him get out of the car, make his deposit in the night box, and then took him on the long ride home. By that time Nick was getting out of night court in Manhattan.

Since the District Attorney of two boroughs shared the headlines with "the crusading gubernatorial candidate" on the cracking of the Rocco case and the breakup of the gambling ring in Brooklyn, cooperation flowed like politicos' saliva. At the request of all the ladies involved, their names and the extent of their participation in the roundup were withheld.

By nightfall, the trio of Tully,

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Norris and Jarvis, started on a last call in the line of duty. Mrs. Joyce said she had had it. She would make dinner for them and kiss them all adieu thereafter. Judge Turner had offered her a fellowship in the peaceful English countryside. Little had she known then how much and how soon she would need it.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Ransom, Ransom, Ransom. . . ." The parakeet was back in his cage.

"Everybody in the neighborhood thought he was callin' them handsome . . . handsome, handsome, handsome. Isn't that cute?"

"Cunning," Jimmie said.

"Miss Tims, we're awful tired, all three of us," Tully said.

"I guess I am, too," she said, "and after you all go I'm goin' to be left all alone again. That's why I took up with Nick. . . ."

"The night General Jarvis died," Tully pushed gently. "Will you tell us what happened after you went to the pawn shop for his medals?"

Miss Tims drew a deep breath and plunged into the story. "Before that, he was so lovin'. I won't ever forget it . . . and he didn't feel very good. We'd had a quarrel you see the night before over Nick. But you know that. And it was so wonderful makin' up and all. And he gave me a hundred dollar bill to get his medals. 'I've got to wear 'em in the morning, Flora. St. Patrick's Day in the morning.'" Flora sniffed back the tears. "When I got home with them he was dead."

"Dead at your house?" Jimmie said.

Flora nodded. "That's how I felt about it too, Mr. Jarvis. I didn't want him disgraced—you know." She shrugged. "I'm nothin' much without him . . . and I knew it would be in the papers. I got a friend down the hall. He works nights sometimes. I gave him fifty dollars and he helped me. We were goin' to pretend that everything was just wonderful. All three of us havin' a wonderful time. And we did it, too. I had to get Nick's chauffeur to drive us, but it worked out fine . . . almost."

"Your friend down the hall," Jimmie said, "he's an entertainer?"

Flora nodded.

"A ventriloquist?" Tully prompted.

"How did you know?"

Tully looked at Jimmie. "Dead men don't curse as elegant as it was said your father did that night. And nobody could look him in the face. Rubber legs, the cabbie said. It all fits—now. You didn't waste much time moving him."

"Love finds a way," Flora said calmly.

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Mrs. Norris leaned forward. "And did you put his medals on him, dearie?"

"Don't call me 'dearie.' I know what you think I am."

"I saved your life this afternoon, Miss Tims."

"That don't give you the right to call me names. Yes, I put his medals on him. I knew he died proud and I wanted everybody else to know it, too."

"A true Southern lady," Jimmie said, and Miss Tims' face just lighted up with a smile.

By its glow the three of them took their departure. At the door Flora said: "Mr. Jarvis, did you get your dispatch case?" Jimmie nodded. "I found it here later, and Nick said Lem Python would see you got it."

"He did," Jimmie said. "Oh yes, indeed he did."

It was a great relief, Jimmie thought, to settle down to the monotony of politics. Helene was really and truly packing. Not in a huff. She had been tempted from the first offer despite its indignity. But many an artist has chiseled beauty out of an indignity, she said. Pygmalion again. Jimmie was wistful. It gave him a charming air of melancholy. Very good for a candidate running on a bachelor's ticket.

On Saturday night Mr. Tully was to come to dinner, all the way to Nyack.

"Isn't it a wee bit of a strain?" Mrs. Norris asked him.

"It'd be more of a strain if I didn't," he said, and ventured for the first time to give Mrs. Norris a hug.

He was invited again and again and again.

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Ever have a day when nothing goes right? When anything you do turns sour? I had a battered face and two trips to jail in one evening to start me off, and then came the crusher . . .

BAGGED

by STEVE APRIL

WHAT THE HELL IS IT YOUR business what I'm in for? I'm in here, ain't I? I don't run my gums about what you're doing in jail. Okay, okay, I know how my face looks. I'm warning you, buddy, I don't go for tough but I'm in a raw mood, so don't get nosey. Matter of fact this is the *second* time I been in jail today. Yeah? Look, I don't care how big you are or how bad my eye looks, I can see plenty out of the other eye, and I'm in a raw, mean mood. Been that way since I quit work this afternoon and . . . Certainly I got a job. What are you in for, vagrancy? What am I mad about . . . ? Okay, maybe I'll feel better talking about it.

You see, I was already boiling when I sat down in the subway, on my way home. Last week there was a package missing from my truck and I get docked eight bucks. Today, they find it in the Jersey City warehouse, mixed in with another shipment, proving it wasn't my fault. But when I ask for my eight bucks back, the boss says I got to wait until Friday, pay day. Made me hot as a two buck pistol and it took all my will power not to rap the fat slob.

Anyway, I'm on the subway heading home. . . . Jeez, will my wife give it to me! She must be worried crazy now and. . . . Oh, the cops notify her. Fine thing, me in jail. Well, I'm on my way home when this old woman sitting beside me gets up to leave —and I notice a crumpled bag stuck between the seat and the window. Looked like a bag from one of these swank shops, lots of colored stripes on it. From the way it was flat and crumpled I knew it only had some papers in it, you know, like garbage. I hate for anybody to slop up a public place. I called out, "Lady, you left this bag here."

I swear that's all I said. But she turned at the door and yelled, "Who you calling a bag, you fat-faced lout!" She left the car with everybody laughing and me ready

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to blow my fuse. First my boss, then this female pain in the neck. Two stations later this little beefy joker walks in the train, sits next to me. Pointing to the striped paper bag he said, "Keep your lunch on your own side of the seat, Mac."

"Ain't mine. I eat in a restaurant, shorty," I growled back at him.

He flicked the bag toward me with his hand but it fell to the floor. "Watch yourself, little man," I told him.

"You want to eat like a slob in the subway, at least throw your papers in the can," he said, kicking the bag toward my side of the floor.

Pushing it his way with my shoe, I asked, "Looking for a bruise?"

"You're too fat for such rugged talk," he said, shoving the bag toward me again with his foot. "And too old, pops."

"Old?" I repeated, loudly, kicking the paper bag his way. "Watch your mouth, half-pint, or you'll be on the floor with the other trash!"

We both jumped to our feet. I busted his lips with my right but he seemed to throw the whole subway car at my eye. You ever see such a black eye? Passengers are yelling as we punch and wrestle until two cops drag us out at the next station. We're booked for disorderly conduct and put in a cell to cool off 'til we're hauled to night court. Okay, okay, stop grinning—I admit it sounded silly when we try to explain to the judge we were battling over an old striped bag of trash which didn't belong to either of us.

So, not having any records, we were fined fifteen bucks each and let go.

Outside the court we shook hands and felt foolish. As you can still see, my eye was not only purple but puffed tightly shut. His lips looked like a couple of overcooked sausages. I said I was sorry about my temper and that he sure hit hard for a little guy. He said he'd always had this steaming temper himself, that I packed a nice wallop for a man of my age. It was a little afer 8 P.M. and I phoned the wife that I was working overtime but on my way home. This guy buys two morning papers —one for me—and I evened the favor by asking him into a corner stool joint for a cup of java. Well, naturally, we both start reading the paper from the back. I mean, I always read the sports first, then the jokes. The point is, we reach this news item about the same time. I shouted at him, "You little dummy, you cost me a grand!"

"Stuffed ape!" he snarled. "I would have kept the five thousand!"

We start making with the punches again—that's where I got the puffed ear—and a cop comes

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running . . . and here I am, in jail again. He's in the end cell.

What do you mean you don't get it? Haven't you read the morning papers yet? Here, I got the item in my back pocket, tore it out of the paper as we were riding in the paddy wagon. Can you read? Okay, I was kidding, I'm in enough trouble, don't get me steaming. There, you see the $1,000 reward this old biddy is offering? Yeah, there in the last paragraph. It says how she drew out $5,000 in hundred buck bills this afternoon and lost them in the subway. To foil any purse snatchers she was carrying the dough in a paper bag with colored stripes. . . .

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The lonely island had been a source of peace and seclusion for Ben Slade, until he found himself sole witness to a murder—the only justice available in the form of a madman with a rifle, whose sole thought was of revenge . . .

LEFT HAND OF JUSTICE

by NORMAN DANIELS

BEN SLADE PEELED OFF THE rubber suit, shook the water from it and spread it on the dock. He rolled flippers and eyepiece into the suit, slipped the air harness over his shoulder and ran from the boat to the cabin. In late March, the wind still blows cold in Maine, especially on an island off the coast.

He fixed a hot toddy and drank it appreciatively, while he relaxed from a session of skin diving. The fish he'd caught for dinner were still out on the dock, along with the spear gun, so he slipped into heavy pants which tucked into high boots and put on a thick woolen shirt, red as a tropical sun. Not because Ben Slade liked the color, but it was a fair amount of insurance against the city hunters Walter Langdon brought to the island with him.

Thinking of that gave Ben a moment's hesitation. He'd practically lived on fish for the last two weeks. The island had plenty of grouse and partridge—for Langdon raised them and turned a flock loose when he had guests. It was poaching, in a way, Ben supposed, but he did own the tip of the island and if any birds came in his direction, he had a right to shoot them. You couldn't ask a partridge on the wing if it belonged to Walt Langdon.

With a boyish grin that belied his 30 years, Ben picked up his rifle, loaded it and slanted it under one arm. He went out and headed south. Fir Island was a narrow five mile strip and all but a small portion belonged to Walt, so that trespassing was a very difficult thing to avoid and Ben had stopped trying a long time ago.

He found a foot trail and walked along it until he heard the crash of brush as someone, clumsy as a cow, came barging along. Ben

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quietly faded into the brush, on the theory that there was little sense in asking for trouble. The ugly scene developed quickly, the characters in it unaware of Ben's presence. He didn't know the people involved and had to identify them only as the murderer and the victim. It was done very cold-bloodedly and deliberately.

The murderer merely said, "Charley," and the victim turned around, saw the gun and tried to run for it. The bullet got him in the back of the neck. He was in full flight when it struck and he kept going another three or four steps before he seemed to lunge forward, like a man taking a dive into shallow water. He fell on his stomach, arms and legs outspread.

The murderer quietly moved out of sight and that was all. Ben stayed there for awhile, thinking it all out, knowing he had to do something, but he wasn't sure just how he should begin.

He could row to the mainland, which was feasible enough, but rather foolish, he thought, when Walt Langdon had only to pick up a radiophone and call the Coast Guard or the Police. Ben walked over to stand and look down at the dead man. There was absolutely no use in examining him. Ben had seen more than one man hit in just that way, by Korean bullets, and none had lived long enough to even cry out.

He crossed through the woods a short way to the road hacked out of the forest so a jeep could travel from one end of the island to the other. Leave it to Langdon to spend a small fortune on a thing like that. Ben disliked him for what he'd done to the island. Once Fir Island had been a resort. If its owners were the co-called pretentious rich, that was all right. They took care of the island. But one by one, they'd died, or gone broke, or lost interest, and Walt Langdon, with all his manufacturing millions, had merely bought up everything. Except the acre at the north tip. He'd wanted it, made extravagantly foolish offers for it, threatened Ben's grandfather who owned it, and finally waved the whole thing aside as not being worth bothering with further, and proceeded to make things as disagreeable as possible for the old man.

Langdon had left the houses as they were and most of them had fallen to ruins. If they got too bad, he'd drench them with gasoline and have a huge bonfire for the entertainment of his guests. He'd refurnished, added to, and generally improved the Victorian house which dominated the isand. It became Langdon's place of seclusion, used for soul searching, he claimed. For Ben's money, Langdon didn't have a soul.

Ben, six feet two, made time with his easy stride and before long, he was walking up the tree-lined drive to the big house. A

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girl, wearing a form fitting pullover and shorts a little tighter than the sweater, didn't seem to find the air crisp and cold. She sat on the porch steps and she jumped up as Ben approached. He knew who she was. Everybody who could read the society pages knew what Karen Langdon looked like.

She came toward him, a fetching, slim, undeniably attractive girl. She said, "You're the man at the end of the island."

"Hello," Ben said. "I'm looking for your father."

"Oh," she said, obviously disappointed, "I hoped you might have come to take me fishing." She looked at him squarely, tilting her head back a little because she was much shorter. He thought he'd never seen eyes as dark blue as hers. "Would you take me out fishing? If I don't get away from all these doddering old . . ."

"I'm sorry," he said. "This is something that won't wait. A man's been killed on the island."

The eyes grew wide, not with horror or concern, but more in tremendous interest. "Killed? Do you mean someone had an accident?"

"I want to talk to your father," he insisted. "He owns the island . . . this must have been one of his guests . . ."

"The emperor," she said with a grin. "My father's the emperor of this island. So you report to him. All right, come on."

She led him into the house. The interior was huge and panelled and looked like the movie version of a room in a British castle. A woman of about 40 sat reading near the fireplace. She was an extremely attractive woman who looked up at him with warm interest.

There was not time for introductions, if Karen had even wanted to make them. Her father walked briskly toward them. Walt Langdon was an impressive man. He wasn't tall; rather he was chunky and square looking, with closely cropped grey hair that stuck up like steel wires.

"Who's this?" he asked Karen.

Ben said, "My grandfather owns the north end . . ."

"Oh yes. Well, I'll tell you what I told your grandfather. I can't drive you off that miserable spot of land, but I don't want you on my property and that includes all the rest of the island . . ."

"Will you shut up?" Ben asked roughly.

It startled Langdon. It made the handsome woman by the fireplace look up with interest, and a man Ben hadn't even seen because he'd been hidden by the high back of the chair he occupied, sprang to his feet.

"I'm sorry," Ben said. "But I've something important to tell you. A man was shot to death a little while ago. A man named Charley."

Langdon's face, ruddy with an-

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ger, turned white suddenly. "Bald . . . five feet seven . . . stocky . . .?" he asked.

"That's him," Ben said.

Langdon raised his voice in a great shout "Charley! Charley?" A man came hurrying from upstairs, a slim man in a grey suit who went straight to the side of the handsome woman, as if he always did that. Another man apparently came from the kitchen, for he wore a large apron over a plaid shirt, and walking shorts. He was a big, brutal looking man.

Langdon pivoted around to eye them all. "Anybody see Charley?"

Nobody had. Langdon turned back to Ben. "You said he was shot to death?"

"He was murdered," Ben said.

The handsome woman sat down slowly and the man at her side held her hand between his own and gently stroked it. Karen seemed totally unaffected. The big man in the apron just stood there, transfixed by surprise and horror. The man who'd been seated in the wing back chair was the only one who moved with authority. He came up to Ben.

"Let's have the details." He turned to look at the big man in the apron. "Harry—go see what really happened to Charley. Mr. Langdon, I suggest you phone the police on the mainland . . ."

"Wait a minute," Langdon said crisply. "When I want advice, I'll ask for it. You . . ." he looked at Ben, "what makes you so sure Charley was murdered?"

"I saw it all."

"The man who killed him?"

Ben nodded, began seeking out the killer.

Langdon shot the next question so brusquely, it brought all of Ben's attention back to him. "Don't identify the man, but is he here in this room right now?"

"Yes," Ben said slowly.

Langdon took his arm roughly, like a policeman making an arrest of a man he's afraid is going to resist. Langdon said, "You come with me. The rest of you stay right here, understand? Karen, see that they do."

Ben balked, by resisting the tug on his arm. "Hold it a minute, Mr. Langdon," he said. "The thing to do is contact the police and have them send a boat."

"You think so?" Langdon asked.

"Yes sir—I do," Ben said.

"All right, come along," Langdon led the way to a room fitted up with portholes and woodwork to resemble the radio room on a ship. Langdon picked up the radiophone and gave it a savage yank, pulling the instrument free. He swung the phone by the wire and smashed it against the tubes and coils, then he flung it aside.

"Now will you realize this is my island and I do as I wish?" he asked Ben. "I'll handle this my own way. Show me now, where Charley's body is."

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Ben eyed him levelly. "If this were anything except murder, I'd tell you to go to hell," he said. "But—come on."

They used a jeep this time, with Langdon driving like a maniac. Ten minutes later, he stood looking down at Charley. Ben moved up beside him and was startled to hear Langdon give a choked sob and turn away to brush angrily at his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Ben said. "He must have been a good friend."

"Young man, Charley Welch gave me my first job. He showed me the ropes, he taught me all I know. He gave me the breaks and he pushed me up until I had momentum enough to take off on my own. He was a lot more than a friend. Charley was part of me!" His voice took on an edge. "All right—we'll go back to the house."

"Don't you even want to know who shot him?" Ben asked.

"Not yet. Nor how it happened, nor why—if you know."

"I don't know," Ben said. "The killer simply called out the name Charley—and then fired."

Langdon drove even faster on the way back. He stalked into the house and, even with his longer legs, Ben had to exert effort to keep up with him. Langdon slammed the door, walked to the middle of the room and motioned Ben closer. Everyone was there. Langdon eyed Ben a moment.

"So that you may identify the murderer by name," he said, "I'll tell you who these people are. My daughter Karen . . ."

Karen said, "We've met, father, and I don't think he suspects me."

Ben said quietly, "It's not a question of suspecting, Miss Langdon. I know."

"Mr. and Mrs. Harmon." Langdon pointed out the handsome woman and her attentive husband. "Dave is one of my lawyers. Evelyn is his wife." As if that told a full history, Langdon dismissed them and indicated the burly man still wearing the apron. "Harry Trevor . . . one of my assistants."

Harry Trevor wiped his hands nervously on the apron. "If you don't mind, Mr. Langdon, I've got that roast in the oven . . ."

"Let it burn," Langdon said. He pointed to the slim man back in the wing chair. "That's Paul Griswold. He's been my secretary for fourteen years. All right. You . . ." he indicated Ben by poking a finger in his ribs, "there's no mistake now? The murderer is here?"

"Yes"

"Don't identify him in any way. Not yet." Langdon left the room for a moment and returned with a rifle. He pumped a cartridge into position. "Now listen to me, all of you. Charley was more of a father to me than my own father ever was. Everything I am, I owe to him. Now he's dead and his murderer has to pay for the crime.

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However—each person in this room owes me the same kind of debt I owed Charley. I made you. Very well—I'm not asking a murderer to step forward out of gratitude to me. I merely state this fact because all of you are wealthy and important, and you carry a great deal of influence."

Ben listened with growing apprehension, for he gradually had come to realize what sort of man Walter Langdon was, and what he had already planned in the active and fertile recesses of his mind.

Langdon went on, speaking slowly. "Any one of you could conceivably get away with murder simply because you have all this money. At the very least, you could stall and dicker and finally come out of it with a whole skin, and maybe just a short prison term. Whoever killed Charley is going to pay for it with his life."

Evelyn Harmon broke the moment of silence following that announcement. "Do you intend to kill the man responsible, Mr. Langdon?"

"I do not," Langdon said. "I intend to leave this rifle on the table with one bullet in the chamber. We'll all go to our rooms and stay there for five minutes. The murderer will come here alone, pick up the rifle and go for a walk. He will use it on himself. We will all then state to the authorities that Charley was accidentally killed in a hunting accident and the man who shot him was so affected by the tragedy that he took his own life. Then, there will be no scandal—no murder motive to be explained.

"Don't you think that's a bit high-handed, Mr. Langdon?" Evelyn Harmon asked quietly.

"The man responsible for Charley's death will not leave this island alive," Langdon said. "I'll break anyone who helps or abets him."

David Harmon seemed to gather some of his wife's courage. "Mr. Langdon," he said, "suppose the murderer doesn't take advantage of this . . . shall we call it an offer?"

"Then the witness will name the murderer and I'll take him for a walk. I'll kill him—and say I was trying to make him a prisoner for the police. I doubt any of you will fail to back up my story. Not unless you want your way of life to change considerably."

"I'm not backing anything," Ben said promptly.

"You'll do as I say," Langdon shouted.

Ben said, "Listen, everyone, you don't have to play this madman's game or accept his left-handed justice. I'm going to go to the mainland and bring the police. My advice to the murderer is to do nothing."

"Now how do you think you'll reach the mainland?" Langdon asked.

"I have a boat of my own."

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"Take care of it, Harry," Langdon ordered, and the big man removed the apron and headed for the door.

Ben said, "Langdon, you might be giving the killer a chance to take my boat and get away."

"Hold it," Langdon said. He threw the gun to Harry. "Watch them all. I'll be back soon."

Ben angrily started after the man. Harry moved faster. He grabbed Ben by the arm, spun him around, shoved the muzzle of the rifle into the pit of his stomach and when Ben made a motion to grab the barrel, Harry flipped the gun, like a marine in combat, and smacked the butt against Ben's jaw. He dropped. Langdon didn't even turn around to see what caused the commotion.

Ben woke up in a bed, with Harry seated alongside, the rifle across his lap. Harry grinned cheerfully.

"You're tough, my friend. Usually, a man who gets clobbered as hard as I hit you, stays out for an hour or so. Why, Mr. Langdon's not even back from sinking your boat."

Ben sat up, rubbed his jaw where the swelling seemed to grow as he touched the spot. "I'll be good," he said. "You have my word."

Harry shrugged. "Okay. It doesn't make much difference to me. But while I sat here, watching you, I did some thinking. You're a young man. I'd like to give you a friendly chance to make a great deal of money."

"How?" Ben asked, even though he knew the answer.

"If I were to bring the name of the murderer to Mr. Langdon, he'd be very appreciative. Now at present, I'm his executive assistant. That means I run his errands and give his orders. Sounds like I'm a flunky, doesn't it? Well, I've got an executive title, I'm a highly educated man and I only look like a pug. I'm also ambitious."

"Whoever killed Charley," Ben said, "gets turned over to the police. That's it! Final! Complete! Without compromise!"

"Ten thousand is a lot of money for a young fellow. I doubt you make that much in a year. Do you?"

"I teach athletics in a high school," Ben said. "That should answer your question. And I don't go for your idea. Any objection if I go back to the living room now?"

"No," Harry said. "But you're an idiot."

Ben got to his feet and steadied himself until the dizziness passed away. "Let's say I will not become an accessory to murder," he said.

He entered the living room simultaneously with Langdon who stormed in the front door. Langdon said, "Now there's no way off this island. I disabled my boat, scuttled the dory and sunk the old

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man's boat at the tip of the island. It's a long swim to the mainland, even in warm weather. At this season of year, the strongest swimmer couldn't make it. The water's too cold."

Ben let his gaze drift slowly to every person in the room. "I'm talking to the murderer," he said, and made certain that when he spoke, he singled no one out. "I give you my word, I'll not reveal your identity until the police arrive."

"How do you propose to get them?" Langdon asked contemptuously.

"I don't know, Langdon. Not yet—but there's a way, and I'll find it. Now I'm going to the cabin where I live. Any man who stops me, is going to find himself in one hell of a fight."

Harry Trevor moved his big bulk in front of Ben. He laughed softly. "I've got a mind to take you up on that," he said. Do you think you could get past me?"

Ben shrugged. "I can tell Langdon you killed Charley."

Harry drew a sharp breath. "Now listen here . . . that's a lie. . . ."

"I didn't accuse you," Ben said. "I merely stated I might. Now get out of my way."

"You'll stay right where you are," Langdon said sharply.

Ben turned around as he reached the door. "You can't stop me, Langdon, and you can't force me to tell you who killed your friend. Are you quite straight on that score?"

Langdon advanced toward him. "I can make more trouble than the old man can handle. You're his grandson. I'll drive him away if I have to spend a fortune . . ." He sat down suddenly "Oh, what's the use? The old man can stay. I'll give him permission to hunt the island all he wants. I'll even pay him a substantial salary to act as caretaker. I should have done that a long time ago. I like the old man. He stood up to me and, by God, I had to back down to him. Yes, that's what I'll do. He'll be well taken care of the rest of his life. And I don't expect anything in return."

"My grandfather hasn't any need of your help, Langdon," Ben said. "He died seven months ago. You liked him so much you never even bothered to find out if he was alive or dead. When you're ready to signal the mainland, let me know."

"Get out of here," Langdon said. "Get out. . . .!"

Ben laughed and let the door slam. It was a long hike back to his end of the island and he used the route along the rocky beach. It had been a warm pleasure to defy Langdon, but Ben had no doubts about his own position. He held Langdon at bay, but Langdon also held him on the island. A dead man was sprawled

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out along the path and something had to be done about that quickly.

Ben stirred up the fire in the cabin and then hunted his grandfather's old shotgun. He slipped shells into the barrels and left the safety off. It was possible he might have sudden need for this weapon.

His first visitor arrived at eight. He blundered through the darkness outside the cabin, making enough noise to waken a sleeping man—and Ben was far from being asleep. Paul Griswold pushed open the cabin door slowly, moved into the room and Ben stepped from the kitchen with the shotgun level.

"Hold on!" Paul cried out. "Hold it . . . please. I'm not armed. ."

"What do you want?" Ben asked.

"A talk. I want to talk to you. Slade, you can't buck Mr. Langdon. He always gets his own way—and in this instance, he's right."

"You actually condone his plan to make the murderer kill himself—or be killed?" Ben lowered the shotgun.

Paul sat down at the kitchen table and Ben noticed for the first time, how thin and drawn he was. He made, probably, fifty thousand a year, as Langdon's executive secretary, and his stomach was undoubtedly one big ulcer.

"Mr. Langdon," Paul said, and his voice crackled with authority, "has set up a closely knit organization. Charley was part of it—so is the man who murdered him. There has to be a motive for a killing like that and whatever it is, it will be seized upon by every big newspaper in the world. Mr. Langdon wants to avoid that. He wants to keep Charley's memory clean and good."

Ben put the shotgun on the table. "Charley may have been the purest man alive, Mr. Griswold. I didn't know him. I'm not interested in why he died, only that he did, and I can name his killer."

"Then name him and get it over with," Paul urged. "Do yourself some good, man. Mr. Langdon waited to find out if anyone took the rifle with the single cartridge. Nobody did. Mr. Langdon's impatient."

Ben laughed. "Harry Trevor was a bit more direct. He talked in solid language, about cash on the line. Your subtle ways are touching, Mr. Griswold, but under no circumstances . . ."

The door opened fast, cutting off the rest of Ben's words. Langdon came into the room quickly, a rifle pressed against his hip and aimed at Paul. He glanced at Ben and snorted in contempt.

"I was sure the man you protected, would come to see you," Langdon said. "That's why I let you go." His attentions returned to Paul. "I'll admit, Paul, I didn't think it would be you."

Paul's mouth opened wider and

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wider as Langdon spoke, until it hung agape while he struggled to find words, and his breath at the same time. The jaws snapped shut and he talked . . . talked for his life.

"Mr. Langdon—I didn't kill Charley. I only came here to try and persuade this idiot to tell me who did."

"Just tell me why you killed him," Langdon said. "I was so sure it was Harry Trevor. I eliminated Dave Harmon because he hasn't the guts. I doubted you had, Paul. You surprised me. Now shall we get on with this . . ."

Ben said, "Langdon, he's telling the truth. He came here to bribe me."

Langdon swung around, the rifle held just the same way so that Ben was now covered. "Are you telling me Paul is not the killer?" he asked.

"I'm not naming anyone or eliminating anyone."

"Then he is," Langdon said. "Get up, Paul."

Ben shook his head. "Okay, okay—he's not the murderer."

Langdon lowered the rifle. "Really? Then that leaves only Dave and Harry, and between those two, I think I can choose the right one. You see, young man, I work with my brains. There's no sense in defying me because I'll find out anyhow. So—which of the two . . .?"

"Did I ever say it was a man?"

Langdon looked startled. "Evelyn? Evelyn Harmon?"

"Or Karen Langdon," Ben said evenly. "Your daughter's here too."

"You're out of your mind," Langdon shouted.

"I've had enough of this," Ben said. "I inherited this land and this cabin. Your rights stop back a few hundred feet so I'm asking you, in a polite way, to leave, but if I have to ask again, I won't be so polite. And take your stooge with you."

"Just the same," Langdon said, "I've eliminated Paul and I don't believe a woman is guilty. I'll find out."

Paul followed obediently after him and Ben felt like airing the room. He had only a moment's peace because Langdon and Paul had hardly reached the path before Evelyn Harmon opened the door and entered hesitantly.

"Sit down," Ben said. "I expected you."

She took the chair he offered. "I was sure Mr. Langdon would follow anyone who left the house and of course, Paul did. He was bound to come here so I ran most of the way and waited out by the dock."

"Why did your husband shoot Charley?" Ben asked.

She bit her lip. "There were reasons," she said.

"I don't know your husband and I don't know you," Ben said, "but by appearance alone, both of

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you stand out from the others here. I'm not going to tell Langdon your husband killed Charley but, I warn you, I will tell the police."

"Dave will tell them, Mr. Slade," Evelyn said, "if he gets the chance. Mr. Langdon means it, you know . . . about making certain whoever killed Charley will die right here on the island."

"Langdon's swinging too much muscle," Ben said. "But I admit he's smart, and there's a good chance he may figure this out."

"Could you get my husband ashore?" she asked. "I'm not going to offer you any money, nor make any promises beyond Dave going to the police and surrendering."

"Maybe," Ben said, "I'd better know why he killed Charley.

"It was on my account," she said evenly. "Charley wasn't the benign gentleman he seemed to be. He'd been after me for years and when I informed him, as graciously as possible, that I wasn't interested, all I did was arouse his determination. When Langdon was about to make Dave head of all his legal business, Charley told me he could keep the job away from Dave, even have him dumped. I knew what the job meant to Dave so I told him I was going away for a weekend with Charley and why I was doing it. I misjudged Dave and underestimated him completely. What's more, Mr. Slade, I'm going to tell all this at Dave's trial."

"I'll get him to the mainland if I possibly can," Ben said. "Is Langdon aware of what Charley's intentions were toward you?"

"No, but he wouldn't have cared much," Evelyn said. "Can you see how much money and power mean to people like us, Mr. Slade?"

Ben, standing near the window to keep an eye on the beach approaches, saw the headlights of the jeep before it rolled to a stop. He turned to Evelyn.

"Someone's coming," he said. "You'll have time to slip out."

She stopped near the door and put a hand on his forearm. "Don't be afraid of Dave. He has no intention of killing you to keep you quiet."

"I believe you," Ben said. "Can Dave swim?"

She shook her head and smiled sadly. "We talked about that. He's a fair swimmer, but not in that choppy water with the temperature down where it is. Nobody could make it."

She slipped out and was gone three minutes before Karen Langdon got down from the jeep and came in. She wore tight capri pants and a woolen blouse with a neckline both low and revealing. She smelled of expensive perfume and she was carefully made up.

"Hi, you champion of the underdog," she said.

"Come in," he said. "I can even provide a drink."

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She looked around the cozy room. "Nice, Ben. Did you make any improvements?"

"Just as my grandfather left it. Just how it'll stay too."

She turned down his renewed offer of a drink. "I can't stay long, Ben. Suppose I told you I know where there's a dory without a hole in its bottom."

"I'd appreciate it," he said with a grin.

"You didn't think I'd go against my father, did you? But a girl can take so much. I'd like to pin a medal on whoever killed Charley. He was a lecherous old man, though I imagine someone told you this by now."

Ben didn't take the bait. "I don't know a thing about him, and it wouldn't matter what he was. I could use the dory though."

"You couldn't leave the island," she said. "Father would see to that.

"Nevertheless, the dory would be handy to have, Karen."

"Will you promise to take me fishing?" she asked coyly. "If I tell you?"

"I won't have to be bribed to do that."

"You're a sweet guy and I'd love to see you outwit dad. The dory is in the boathouse, under a pile of old tarp. Dad didn't quite burn all the bridges to the mainland."

"Thanks," he said. "You can give me a ride to the manor house if you will."

She nodded and got up. "Like my outfit?" she asked. "I put it on especially for you."

"It's great," he said, "but wasted at the moment, because I want to get this person off the island right away."

They got aboard the jeep and she drove it back to the house. They found Langdon, Paul, Harry and Dave playing gin, while Evelyn sat quietly reading. Langdon looked up with interest.

"What brings you here? Are you ready to tell?"

"No," Ben said. "No, I'm not. I think you're way out of line on this and I won't be bought or intimidated. There's a way to beat you."

Langdon laughed. "All you have to do is figure it out, eh? Make yourself at home, young man. I'm sorry I spoke so roughly down at your cabin. You're quite welcome here."

"Thanks." Ben walked over to a sideboard and mixed himself a highball. He carried it to a chair before the fireplace, half the length of the room from the card game. Karen watched him with a sulky smile and he thought she'd join him, but she went upstairs instead. After ten minutes, it was Dave Harmon who drifted over and sat down on the divan beside Ben.

"Evelyn told me she paid you a visit," he said in a low voice. "I'm supposed to try to persuade you to

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help Langdon. It was my idea, the only excuse I could think of, to talk to you alone. Act as if you're hard to convince, but you might be weakening."

Ben said sharply and loudly. "No! Go back to your card game."

"Good," Dave said. "I shot Charley because he had it coming. I know very well I'll go to prison, but that's not enough for Langdon. He wants the murderer dead. That's his ego asserting itself, but he bows to it and he'll have his way unless you can get me off the island."

Ben said, "There's a boat . . . but maybe you wouldn't go for the idea . . ." His voice dropped lower and he talked for several minutes.

Finally Dave got up, put a hand on his shoulder. "Think about it, my friend," he said. "I'm going outside to have a smoke. I'll be back in ten minutes."

Dave stopped at the card game for a moment, bent over and whispered to Langdon before he continued to the front door. A blast of cold air came in as he opened the door and went out. The card game went on for another minute or two and then Langdon jumped up. He hurried into the next room and came back with two rifles and a revolver. He handed a rifle to Harry, the sidearm to Paul.

"It's Dave," he said. "He'll head for the boathouse. The fool thinks there's a dory waiting." Langdon paused by Ben's chair. "You clear out of here before I get back. I dislike stubborn people, but I detest stupid ones."

"I'm not so stupid I can't tell the police exactly what happened here," Ben retorted.

"I'll say you're a liar and you hate me enough to tell such a preposterous falsehood, because I won't give you the run of the island. My friends will back me up. Even Evelyn will." He straightened and turned toward her. "Won't you, my dear? Because if you don't, I'll turn you into as big a liar as this obstinate fool."

Evelyn put the book down and covered her face with one hand. It was a gesture of silent, complete resignation and surrender.

"All I had to do was wait," Langdon said. "Wait, and use my head."

He went out to overtake Paul and Harry, already on their way to cover the boathouse. Evelyn began to sob quietly. Ben threw his empty highball glass at the fireplace. When Karen came down and sat beside him, he didn't look at her.

"All right," she said, "I double-crossed you. Did you think I wouldn't?"

"I didn't think at all," Ben said with a sigh. "There's no boat, is there?"

"No—all Dave will find is my father, Harry and Paul."

"Why don't you join them?"

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he asked roughly. "It might be fun —seeing a man murdered."

"Don't be bitter," she said. "It's justice, isn't it? And more merciful than the treatment he'd get on the mainland."

"It's a matter of pride," Ben said. "I let your father get the best of me."

"I know, Ben, but you can't beat him. Nobody has yet. You can still put yourself in his favor. Why not? He could do so much for you, and we could be great friends. There just isn't any sense in being sore about it."

Evelyn arose and went upstairs. Karen pushed closer to Ben. He put an arm around her shoulders and she snuggled tightly against him.

"I guess," he said, "there's one approach I'm amenable to."

They were still sitting like that, warmed by the fire and their embrace. Karen was only dimly aware of the angry steps pounding across the room, following the heavy slam of the front door. Langdon jabbed the muzzle of his rifle against Ben's ribs.

"Get up," he said. "On your feet!" Dave didn't show up at the boathouse. He's still on the island. Where is he, Slade? Where is he, before I pull the trigger . . ."

Ben got to his feet and studied his wrist watch a moment. "About now," he said, "Dave is telling the police all about it. You're going to be arrested, Langdon, and tried for conspiracy to murder. Dave, his wife, and I will be the witnesses against you, and I think you're going to be convicted. At the very least, you'll have a real nasty time of it and, worst of all, you now find yourself backed up against a wall. You've been outthought, Langdon. You didn't get your own way, and I doubt you ever will again."

"Dave is on the island," Langdon shouted. "It's impossible for him to get off."

"Watch for the Coast Guard boat," Ben said. "It'll head this way in a short time."

"Nobody got ashore! How could he get to the mainland?"

"He walked," Ben said. "He put on my skin diving suit. It's rubber, full protection against the cold. He used flippers and a tank of air. He could even crawl along the bottom if he had to. I doubt he had any trouble at all. Good night, Mr. Langdon."

Ben walked away from him, disdaining the menace of the rifle. He stepped in front of Karen and put a finger under her chin. "You're a beautiful girl," he said cheerfully. "Too bad you haven't got a pulse."

He closed the door behind him and began walking toward the tip of the island. He felt pretty good about things. He thought his grandfather would have too.

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G. K. Chesterton's fame as a detective-story writer has spanned many years, and who among us is brave enough to predict when Father Brown will be forgotten? But G. K. Chesterton as detective-story reviewer is rather less well known, though he did review for a periodical called "G. K.'s Weekly," from which the following charming, witty, and penetrating piece is taken.

HOW TO WRITE A DETECTIVE STORY

by G. K. CHESTERTON

LET IT BE UNDERSTOOD THAT I write this article as one wholly conscious that he has failed to write a detective story. But I have failed a good many times. My authority is therefore practical and scientific, like that of some great statesman or social thinker dealing with Unemployment or the Housing Problem. On making a rough calculation I find I must have failed at least 54 times to write a detective story; and my failures are bound up in three books and many magazines. I do not pretend that I have achieved the ideal that I set up here for the young student; I am, if you will, rather the awful example for him to avoid. Nonetheless I believe that there are ideals of detective writings, as of everything else worth doing; and I wonder they are not more often set out in all that popular didactic literature which teaches us how to do so many things so much less worth doing; as for instance, how to succeed.

Indeed, I wonder very much that the title at the top of this article does not stare at us from every bookstall. Pamphlets are published teaching people all sorts of things that cannot possibly be learned, such as personality, popularity, poetry, and charm. Even those parts of literature and journalism that most obviously cannot be learned are assiduously taught. But here is a piece of plain straightfoward literary craftsmanship, constructive rather than creative, which could to some limited extent be taught and even, in very lucky instances, learned.

Sooner or later I suppose the want will be supplied, in that commercial system in which supply immediately answers to demand, and in which everybody seems to

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be thoroughly dissatisfied and unable to get anything he wants. Sooner or later, I suppose, there will not only be textbooks teaching criminal investigators, but textbooks teaching criminals. It will be but a slight change from the present tone of financial ethics; and when the shrewd and vigorous business mind has broken away from the last lingering influence of dogmas invented by priests, journalism and advertisement will show the same indifference to the taboos of today as does today to the taboos of the Middle Ages. Burglary will be explained like usury; and there will be no more disguise about cutting throats than there is about cornering markets. The bookstalls will be brightened with titles like *Forgery in Fifteen Lessons* and *Why Endure Married Misery?*—with a popularization of poisoning fully as scientific as the popularization of Divorce and Birth Control. But, as we are so often reminded, we must not be in a hurry for the arrival of a happy humanity; and, meanwhile, we seem to be quite as likely to get good advice about committing crimes as good advice about detecting them, or about describing how they could be detected.

I imagine the explanation is that the crime, the detection, the description of the detection, and the description of the description, do all demand a certain slight element of thought, while succeeding and writing a book on success in no way necessitate this tiresome experience. Anyhow, I find in my own case that when I begin to think of the theory of detective stories, I do become what some would call theoretical. That is, I begin at the beginning, without any pep, snap, zip or other essential of the art of arresting the attention, without in any way disturbing or awakening the mind.

The first and fundamental principle is that the aim of a mystery story—as of every other story and every other mystery—is not darkness but light. The story is written for the moment when the reader does understand, not merely for the many preliminary moments when he does not understand. The misunderstanding is only meant as a dark outline of cloud to bring out the brightness of that instant of intelligibility; and most bad detective stories are bad because they fail upon this point.

The writers have a strange notion that it is their business to baffle the reader; and that so long as they baffle him it does not matter if they disappoint him. But it is not only necessary to hide a secret, it is also necessary to have a secret, and to have a secret worth hiding. The climax must not be an anticlimax; it must merely consist of leading the reader a dance and leaving him in a ditch. Dr. Watson may be a fool, but he must not be an April fool. The climax must

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not be only the bursting of a bubble but rather the breaking of a dawn; only that the daybreak is accentuated by the dark. Any form of art, however trivial, refers back to some serious proofs; and though we are dealing with nothing more momentous than a mob of Watsons, all watching with round eyes like owls, it is still permissible to insist that it is the people who sat in darkness who have seen a great light; and that the darkness is only valuable in making vivid a great light in the mind. It always struck me as an amusing coincidence that the best of the Sherlock Holmes stories bore, with a totally different application and significance, a title that might have been invented to express this primal illumination—the title of *Silver Blaze*.

The second great principle is that the soul of detective fiction is not complexity but simplicity. The secret may appear complex, but it must *be* simple; and in this also it is a symbol of higher mysteries. The writer is there to explain the mystery; but he ought not to be needed to explain the explanation. The explanation should explain itself; it should be something that can be hissed (by the villain, of course) in a few whispered words or shrieked; preferably by the heroine before she swoons under the shock of the belated realization that two and two make four.

Now some literary detectives make the solution more complicated than the mystery, and the crime almost more complicated than the solution. The explanation is something like this: "The vicar's first curate did indeed intend to murder him and loaded and then lost his pistol, which was picked up by the second curate and placed on a particular shelf in the vestry to incriminate the third curate, who had a long and lingering love affair with the niece of the organist, who is not really the niece of the organist but the long-lost daughter of the vicar; the organist, being in love with his ward, transfers the pistol to the coat pocket of the second curate, but the coat is accidentally put on by the first curate, who pulls out the pistol in mistake for a pocket handkerchief, and the vicar mistaking him for the real owner of the coat (who had done him a deep and complicated injury twenty years ago in Port Said) rushes furiously upon him (the pronouns are getting mixed like everything else) so that the holder of the pistol (whoever he may be by this time) is forced to fire in self-defense and the vicar falls dead."

Now anyone who will attentively study that explanation, as given in the above words, will realize the extreme difficulty of uttering it in a shriek before falling in a swoon, or even of hissing it in a few well-chosen words into the

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ear of a pallid listener before gliding swiftly from the room. But the first principle is, as I have said, that the whole story ought to exist for the sake of the sentence so shrieked or hissed. A detective story is built for that explanation as a big gun is built for the explosion. And it would be an exaggeration to call the paragraph above quoted explosive.

Thirdly, it follows from this that so far as possible the fact or figure explaining everything should be a familiar fact or figure. The criminal should be in the foreground—not in the capacity of criminal, but in some other capacity which nevertheless gives him a natural right to be in the foreground. I will take as a convenient case the one I have already quoted: the plot of *Silver Blaze*. Sherlock Holmes is as familiar as Shakespeare; so there is no injustice by this time in letting out the secret of one of the first of these famous tales.

News is brought to Sherlock Holmes that a valuable race horse has been stolen, and the trainer guarding him murdered by the thief. Various people, of course, are plausibly suspected of the theft and murder; and everybody concentrates on the serious police problem of who can have killed the trainer. The simple truth is that the horse killed him. Now I take that as a model because the truth is so simple. The truth really is, as Sherlock Holmes said to Watson, so very obvious. At any rate, the point is that the horse is very obvious. The story is named after the horse; it is all about the horse; the horse is in the foreground all the time, but always in another capacity. As a thing of great value he remains for the reader the Favorite; it is only as a criminal that he is a dark horse. It is a story of theft in which the horse plays the part of the jewel until we forget that the jewel can also play the part of the weapon.

That is one of the first rules I would suggest, if I had to make rules for this form of composition. Generally speaking, the agent should be a familiar figure in an unfamiliar function. The thing that we realize must be a thing that we recognize—that is, it must be something previously known, and it ought to be something prominently displayed. Otherwise there is no surprise in mere novelty. It is useless for a thing to be unexpected if it was not worth expecting. But it should be prominent for one reason and responsible for another.

A great part of the craft of writing mystery stories consists in finding a convincing but misleading reason for the prominence of the criminal, over and above his legitimate business of committing the crime. Many mysteries fail merely by leaving him at loose ends in the story, with apparently nothing to

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do except commit the crime. He is generally well off, or our just and equal law would probably have him arrested as a vagrant long before he was arrested as a murderer. We reach the stage of suspecting such a character by a very rapid if unconscious process of elimination. Generally we suspect him merely because he has not been suspected.

The art of narrative consists in convincing the reader for a time, not only that the character might have come on the premises with no intention to commit a felony, but that the author has put him there with some intention that is not felonious. For the detective story is only a game; and in that game the reader is not really wrestling with the criminal but with the author.

What the writer has to remember, in this sort of game, is that the reader will not say, as he sometimes might of a serious or realistic study: "Why *did* the surveyor in green spectacles climb the tree to look into the lady doctor's back garden?" He will insensibly and inevitably say, "Why did the author *make* the surveyor climb a tree, or introduce any surveyor at all?" The reader may admit that the town would in any case need a surveyor, without admitting that the tale would in any case need one. It is necessary to explain his presence in the tale (and the tree), not only by suggesting why the town council put him there, but why the author put him there. Over and above any little crimes he may intend to indulge in, in the inner chamber of the story, he must have already some other justification as a character in a story and not only as a mere miserable material person in real life. The instinct of the reader, playing hide-and-seek with the writer, who is his real enemy, is always to say with suspicion, "Yes, I know a surveyor might climb a tree; I am quite aware that there are trees and there are surveyors; but why did you make this particular surveyor climb this particular tree in this particular tale, you cunning and evil-minded man?"

This I should call the fourth principle to be remembered; as in the other cases, people will not realize that it is practical, because the principle on which it rests sounds theoretical. It rests on the fact that in the classification of the arts, mysterious murders belong to the grand and joyful company of the things called jokes. The story is a fancy; an avowedly fictitious fiction. We may say if we like that it is a very artificial form of art; I should prefer to say that it is professedly a toy, a thing that children "pretend" with. From this it follows that the reader, who is a simple child and therefore very wideawake, is conscious not only of the toy but of the invisible playmate who is the maker of the toy. The innocent child is very sharp and not a little suspicious.

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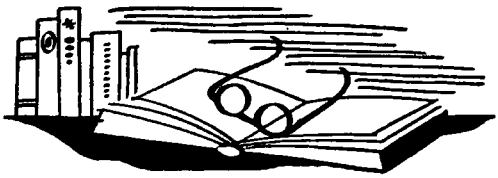
And one of the first rules, I repeat, for the maker of a tale that shall be a trick, is to remember that the masked murderer must have an artistic right to be on the scene and not merely a realistic right to be in the world. He must not only come to the house on business, but on the business of the story; it is not only a question of the motive of the visitor but of the motive of the author. The ideal mystery story is one in which he is such a character as the author would have created for his own sake, or for the sake of making the story move in other necessary matters, and then be found to be present there, not for that obvious and sufficient reason, but for a second and a secret one. I will add that for this reason, despite the sneers at "love interest," there is a good deal to be said for the Miss Braddon tradition of sentiment and slower or more Victorian narration. Some may call it a bore, but it may be a blind.

Lastly, the principle that the detective story like every literary form starts with an idea, and does not merely start out to find one, applies also to its more material mechanical detail. Where the story turns upon detection, it is still necessary that the writer should begin from the inside, though the detective approaches from the outside. Every good problem of this type originates in a positive notion, which is in itself a simple notion—some fact of daily life that the writer can remember and the reader can forget. Here again I might well take *Silver Blaze* as a good working model—where a perfectly fair deduction is founded on the opium being sprinkled on a dish of curry and not something more usual and less highly seasoned. Perhaps the whole story began with the dish of curry, and the coincidence of the drug and the condiment, and round it were built up the stables and the racecourse and the whole stage scenery of the tale. But anyhow a tale has to be founded on a truth, if it be only the taste of curry; and though opium may be added to it, it must not merely be an opium dream.



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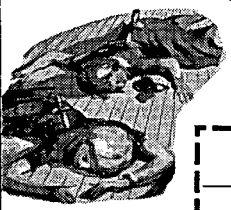

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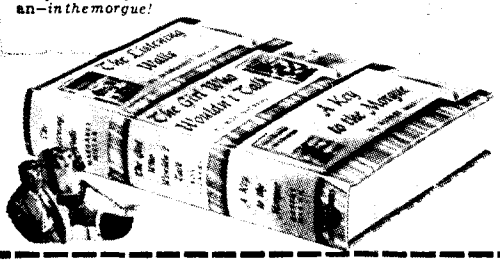

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